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"Life Does Not Live": Experience and Life in the Philosophies of Theodor W. Adorno and Giorgio Agamben

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Abstract

This thesis provides a critical examination of the concepts of experience and life in the work of Theodor W. Adorno and Giorgio Agamben. The shared context of their thought consists in an examination of damaged life which reaches its apotheosis in "Auschwitz", an account of the destruction of experience in modernity, and an emphasis that the path to a form of life beyond damaged life can only be constructed immanently, through damaged life itself.

The philosophical problem that this thesis addresses is the question of the possibility of a life beyond damaged life. Given the destruction of experience encapsulated in an idea of a life that does not live, how can a critical subjectivity found the possibility of a path beyond such a reified context ? Both Agamben and Adorno delineate such a path through a dissolution of subjectivity which can open itself to the possibility of a different experience of life.

It is argued that Adorno's concept of negative dialectics gives the grounding for the possibility of a critical subjectivity that can found itself within its own dissolution through an experience of possibility produced by a deepening of the contradictions of damaged life.

The first two chapters critically examine the accounts of bare life and damaged life through Adorno and Agamben's writings on Auschwitz and life as survival. Chapters three and four clarify the philosophical antecedents to the concept of life in Adorno's work and argue that a path beyond damaged life cannot be configured in terms of a re-enchantment of nature.

Chapter five provides a bridge in the thesis between the analysis of concepts of life and experience, through a critical examination of the account of the decay of experience given in Agamben and Adorno's work. It is argued that both their accounts are too undifferentiated, as they miss the possibilities that arise in the decay of experience. However, Adorno's emphasis on dialectical experience rather than an authoritative concept of experience, gives his philosophy a resource with which to think the possibility of another form of life, even amidst the destruction of experience.

In the final three chapters, I reconstruct three central and related concepts of experience beyond damaged life that Adorno outlines throughout his work; a concept of interpretation, a concept of a negative redemptive breakthrough, and finally the metaphysical experience of reconciliation. These experiences relate to a concept of life in terms of an embodied thought, but not as an experience of a naturalistic, unchangeable ground. The possibility of an experience of life remains in the experience of a dissolution of subjectivity that does not turn into total destruction.

Contents

Abbreviations Used in the Text.

Works by Adorno

References are given to the original German text in page numbers, followed by the page numbers from the English translation. Most of the translations cited in the thesis are taken directly from the English translations. Where translations have been amended this is indicated in the endnotes.

AP "Die Aktualitat der Philosophie", in Gesammelte Schriften, Volume 1, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996). "The Actuality of Philosophy", translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor, Telos, no.31, Spring 1977, pp.120-133.

AT Ästhetische Theorie, Gesammelte Schriften, Volume 7, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996). Aesthetic Theory, translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor. (The Athlone Press, London, 1999).

BW Theodor W. Adorno / Walter Benjamin, Briefwechsel 1928-1940, edited by Henri Lonitz, (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main). Adorno- Benjamin,The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940, translated by Nicholas Walker, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999).

DA (written with Max Horkheimer), Dialektik der Aufklarung: Philosophische Fragmente, Gesammelte Schriften, Volume 3, (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1996). Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments, translated by Edmund Jephcott, edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2002).

DSH Drei Studien zu Hegel, Gesammelte Schriften, Volume 5, (Frankfurt am main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996). Hegel:Three Studies, translated by Shierry Weber Nicholsen. (MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England,1993).

INH "Die Idee der Naturgeschichte", in Gesammelte Schriften, Volume 1, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996)."The Idea of Natural History", translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor, Telos, no.60., Summer 1984, pp 111-125

KK Kant's Kritik der Reinen Vernunft, Nachgelassene Schriften, 4, (Frankfurt am Main). Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, edited by Rolf Tiedemann, translated by Rodney Livingstone. (Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 2001).

MM Minima Moralia, Gesammelte Schriften, volume 4, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996). Minima Moralia. Reflections from Damaged Life, translated by E.F.N. Jephcott. (Verso, London and New York, 1997).

ME Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie, Gesammelte Schriften, Volume 5, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996). Against Epistemology:A Metacritique.Studies in Husserl and the Phenomenological Antinomies, translated by Willis Domingo. (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1982).

ND Negative Dialektik, Gesammelte Schriften, Volume 6, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996). Negative Dialectics, translated by E.B.Ashton. (Routledge, London and New York, 1966).

NL Noten zur Literatur, Gesammelte Schriften, volume 11, (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1996). Notes to Literature, Volumes 1 and 2, translated by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Columbia University Press, New York,1992).

MBP Metaphysik: Begriff und Probleme, Nachgelassene Schriften, 14, (Suhrkamp Verlag; Frankfurt am Main). Metaphysics, Concept and Problems, translated by Edmund Jephcott, and edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Polity Press, Cambridge, Oxford, UK, 2000).

PMP Probleme der Moralphilosophie, Nachgelassene Schriften, 10, (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main). Problems of Moral Philosophy, edited by Thomas Schröder, and translated by Rodney Livingstone. (Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 2000).

SO "Zu Subjekt und Objekt", in Gesammelte Schriften, volume 10.2, (Frankfurt am main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996). "On Subject and Object", in Critical Models. Interventions and Catchwords, translated by Henry W. Pickford , (Columbia University Press, New York, 1998).

Introduction

The epigraph that Adorno uses on the front page of Minima Moralia from Ferdinand Kürnberger is "Life does not live".[1] What is this "life" that "does not live" ? There are two problems contained within this paradoxical sentence. First, there is the problem of how to give an account of this deadened form of life. How can we characterise such a life that does not live, what are its features, and what has brought life to this situation ? Is this a permanent form of life or a crisis in experience that relates to particular historical events ?

The second problem is whether we need an ontological concept of life to delineate the features of a damaged form of life. Implicit in the phrase "life does not live" is the assumption that the verb "to live" implies a fuller sense of life which either lies repressed beneath the existence of a life that does not live, or as a suppressed possibility within this deadened form of existence. The philosophical concept of life that underpins a statement such as "life does not live" needs to be clarified. Is this an ontological concept of life as a fundamental prepredicative mode of human relating to the world which has been eroded and suppressed through forms of society and cognition that only prioritise subsumptive predicative forms of judgement and knowledge ? This argument would postulate a mode of living more fundamental than the dominant modes of relating and experiencing in

modern societies. The problem with such a concept of life is that it presumes a "natural" mode of living, unchanged and unaffected historically.

The relation between concepts of life and experience is crucial to an interrogation of what it means for there to be a "life that does not live". Central to such an interrogation of experience and life will be an analysis of the concepts of Erlebnis and Erfahrung, the two words for experience in German. The concept of experience as Erfahrung presupposes an idea of experience as a journey, a learning process, that is individual, but dependent upon a tradition and a community. An experience, in this sense, is an achievement, an accomplishment that only arrives through an immersion in a culture and tradition, which allows for a departure through the accumulated and assimilated experience of such a tradition. Such a concept of experience presumes an individual who is able over time to order and unify an experience through an accumulated memory and sedimentation of tradition and community. However, this is not a simple capitulation to tradition, but the building of a new tradition in the process of forming new modes of living through a harmonious unfolding that absorbs yet surpasses the past. Erfahrung also has a more limited sense as the description of the cognitive experience involved in judgement and knowledge. The process in the Kantian concept of experience, whereby a unified subject orders and classifies the raw data of experience, is a process that can be termed experience as a whole. This experience, then, is the process whereby an inert objectivity is synthesised by a subject and raw sensations are formed into the object of experience. In some sense, experience is configured here as a junior partner to the understanding, in

that, in the Kantian sense there is no knowledge without experience, but experience without the synthesising operations of subjective judgement, could not be termed experience at all. The concept of Erfahrung contains a full concept of communal experience, and a limited or narrowed concept of cognitive or subsumptive experience. Adorno's use of the Hegelian and Kantian concepts of Erfahrung produces a dialectical and historical mediation of these two forms of Erfahrung.[2]

It was in response to this narrowed concept of experience as a form of cognitive subsumption, that the concept of Erlebnis arose in German philosophy in the late 19th century.[3] Willhelm Dilthey attempted to articulate a form of experience that would literally revivify philosophy, a philosophy, that he argued, in terms of Kant's concept of experience had "no real blood flowing in the veins".[4] Erlebnis referred to a form of experience that moved beyond subject and object differentiations, either in the direction of a more primordial concept of experience as "lived experience" prior to subject and object distinction, or as a form of experience which moves beyond the everyday through an awakened experience that reveals new forms of temporality and spatiality for human experience. Lived experience also has its cognitive mode, in terms of the transcendental epoché, practiced in Husserlian phenomenology, a bracketing of experience in terms of its historical, social and cultural components that could give intuitive access to the unity of an intending consciousness with its intentional object, in a mode explicitly ruled out by Kant's concept of experience. The relation of Erlebnis to the subject of experience is paradoxical, in that in its Husserlian form there is an attempt to think the reality of a transcendental ego, whereas in other forms of lived

experience, the subject is dissolved in an overarching unity of subject and object. As Erlebnis originated in response to epistemological concepts of Erfahrung, it bypasses the fuller historical concept of Erfahrung. The conflict between Erlebnis and Erfahrung becomes a conflict between ontology and epistemology, which doesn't take account of the historical content of experience. Both Adorno and Benjamin refer disparagingly to a concept of experience as Erlebnis, but the use of a concept of life or nature certainly gestures towards a shared history with Lebensphilosophie, a shared history that is immediately suppressed, but as we will see is important in trying to disentangle concepts of experience and life in Adorno's work.

Many commentators have pointed out the indeterminate nature of Adorno's use of a concept of experience.[5] The content and relation of Adorno's concept of experience as both historical concept and speculative or foundational concept, and the relation of such a concept to the idea of a "life that does not live" will form the central core of this research. However, the purpose of this thesis is more than a critical exegesis of confused or puzzling concepts within Adorno's work. I want to take seriously Adorno's provocative comment that certain historical events, particularly the event that he names as "Auschwitz", reveal an experience of life in modernity which closes down all possibilities for living. If the extreme nature of the events at Auschwitz transform the possibility of living, what can this mean for the continuation of life in the sixty years after Auschwitz ? If we take seriously the account of a near completed destruction of experience which results in a "life that does not live", then how can there be any experience of this state

itself ? How can a subject bear witness to its own ruin ? It is only through a negative ontology, a delineation of the false state of damaged life, that Adorno attempts to negatively reflect, through a deepening of contradictions, the possibility of a different way of living. However, this rigorous negativity has frustrated many interpreters, and led recent commentaries on Adorno's work to attempt to give a fuller account of a positive ontology or epistemology that could be developed from his work. Such approaches have concentrated on an attempt to outline either a more delineated account of what a life that could live would mean, or to re-describe Adorno's philosophy in terms of a transcendental rationality which could make experience possible if only life were organised differently.[6] What these interpretations tend towards, in different ways, is a dissolution of the importance of dialectics within Adorno's thought, in an invocation of an element of life, experience or rationality that is free of contradiction. Furthermore, in an insistence on Adorno's thought as epistemological, there is a downplaying of the speculative moment of his negative dialectics. Adorno's speculative philosophy and its relationship to an experience as a bodily experience that lies at the limits of thought is a crucial question for his philosophical work, the question of the meaning and possibility of a metaphysical experience. Such a metaphysical experience will be tied to the possibility of an experience of possibility itself which registers in a bodily form but rests in a zone between actual and logical possibility. The result of negative dialectics lies in a speculative experience that is difficult to delineate, but importantly, registers as an experience of life beyond the reified context.

Giorgio Agamben is the contemporary philosopher who has rigorously interrogated this theme of a dissolution of experience, a dissolution that results from a destruction of experience in late modernity encapsulated by Auschwitz. He has argued that it is through such an experience of a bare life that there can be a founding of a new form of life or politics which can resist the reified context. The comparison of Agamben's work with Adorno's concept of damaged life is interesting because of a refusal of Agamben to engage in any serious way with Adorno's work , alongside a comprehensive similarity of many of the themes that they address.[7] The common point of contact with Adorno for Agamben is the work of Walter Benjamin, who Agamben has drawn on extensively and translated into Italian. Agamben's sparse references to Adorno are usually critical, and in relation to defending an interpretation of Benjamin in non-dialectical terms. Despite these differences, but, also, as we will see, because of them, Agamben's work is a fruitful source of interrogation if we want to determine the philosophical heritage of some of the central insights of Adorno's writing on life and experience. Agamben`s work on bare life, Auschwitz, and the decay of experience shares a number of affinities with Adorno`s critical project, although these affinities breakdown at the point of the affirmation of an ontological experience in Agamben's work, and his hostility to any form of dialectical thinking. The shared context is an account of damaged or bare life in modernity as an empty space in which power can produce and effect responses, and in an attempt to delineate forms of critical subjectivity which do not rely on vital notions of desire. Both Agamben and Adorno want to recuperate a concept of "life that does not live",

which as a form of life in which something like a bare life cannot be isolated can provide a position for a critical subjectivity.

The important difference is staked upon the territory of how such a critical position can be delineated, and the nature of speculation or metaphysical experience as it relates to such a critical position. Such speculative experience will be material, in that it is a speculative experience of a life that only exists at the margins of experience. This experience changes the possibilities of experience itself, in the sense that such an experience opens the subject to a different way of living. However, this opening of the subject can only be conceived through a dissolution of subjectivity itself. The problem that both Agamben and Adorno attempt to deal with is how such a dissolution of experience can be both a dissolution and an opening. How does the negativity and destruction of experience intrinsic to a concept of a "life that does not live" open itself up to the possibility of redemption ?

Agamben's response to this question results in a turn away from materialism and towards a fundamental ontology of Being, which can locate itself through a redemptive moment of appropriating a form of life which differentiates itself from bare life only through its own conscious appropriation of such a damaged state. Agamben reads redemption through the theological mode that the life which is most abandoned can be saved. In this thesis, I locate Adorno's account of the relation between redemption and reconciliation through an account of damaged life, as an account which immanently presents a dissolution of subjectivity that can open up the subject to a possibility of life itself, which involves a turn to

materialism, rather than a fundamental ontology of Being. Rather than an appropriation of bare life, the dissolution of subjectivity opens the subject to a horror at its own reification, which demands political change.

The originality of the thesis lies in the elucidation of the concepts of experience and life within Adorno's work. I argue that a concept of life as embodied subjectivity functions within Adorno's work, but is not clearly delineated, because of his argument that there can be no account given of a fulfilled experience from the position of damaged life itself. However, I trace this account of life through Adorno's appropriation and critique of Freud and Nietzsche, and argue that Adorno's account of embodied experience functions as a model of fulfilled experience. Such a model of fulfilled experience, though, is fundamentally unfulfilled, in that it changes the very concept of fulfillment. Thus, the central importance of the changed concept of reconciliation within Adorno's work, a concept of reconciliation which emphasises error, exaggeration, and exhaustion as marks of experience which open the subject to a life lived in fundamentally different ways than are possible within the context of identity thinking.

This thinking cannot be conceived as a re-enchantment of nature, or a return to embodied experience as a ground of experience, as this experience is subject to change throughout history. There is no possibility of a return or opening up to material relations as inferences which can be re-awakened in a straightforward manner. However, the problem I delineate is that Adorno's emphasis on metaphysical experience requires a concept of everyday experience that survives its

own decay or destruction, to be able to access the dissolution of subjectivity which functions as openness rather than annihilation.

It is this tension between openness and annihilation of experience that is so thoroughly outlined in Agamben's work. My use of Agamben is as a comparison which serves as delineating a trajectory for many of Adorno's concepts which nevertheless turns these concepts fundamentally away from both dialectical thinking and from materialism. The central question of how, within the context of a "life that does not live", a subject can experience the possibility of life beyond this context, is conceived by Agamben in redemptive and ontological terms, rather than in dialectical and materialist terms.

This conception, though, opens up problems for Adorno's own methodology. How can an immanently negative dialectics conjure a transcendent moment without an affirmative redemption ? How can the possibility of an experience of life at the limits of experience be both a material experience, and an experience beyond the bounds of possible experience ? Because Agamben takes seriously the question of the destruction of experience and of the form of life as survival within this destruction, his opposition to any conception of a materialist concept of possibility or a dialectical methodology poses the question of whether such methodologies can have a philosophical worth given the shared analysis of the challenge to metaphysics posed by Auschwitz.

This thesis attempts to defend Adorno's changed concept of metaphysics as an experience which can open the subject to a critical relation with a context of reified life. Such a critical relation can only occur through the dissolution of

subjectivity as reified life, which opens the subject to an experience of its own reification and the possibility of reconciliation. Such an experience demands that subjective experience is not so reified itself that it can only be saved through an affirmative redemption. The comparison of Adorno with Agamben, therefore, opens his work to their common philosophical forebears in terms of Walter Benjamin and Martin Heidegger. Both Agamben and Adorno emphasise an account of the decay of experience in Benjamin's work, which stresses modernity as the destruction of experience. What they both downplay is Benjamin's more dialectical appreciation of both the possibilities and the losses contained within a process of the destruction of experience. This emphasis on one pole of an account of the destruction of experience leads Agamben to an emphasis on a Benjaminian concept of redemption, which has all its political connotations removed. It becomes purely theological. For Adorno, such an emphasis on the destruction of experience leads to contradictions within his concepts of experience, metaphysical experience, redemption and reconciliation which cannot lead beyond a dissolution of experience as dissolution itself. My argument is that any interpretation of Adorno's work needs to return to Benjamin's more nuanced account of the destruction of experience, and to differentiate Adorno's concept of redemption from his concept of reconciliation.

Second, the relation to ontology opened up by the comparison of Agamben's concept of bare life and Adorno's account of damaged life returns us to Heidegger's work in a different light. Agamben's use of Heidegger relies on a reading of his work, which emphasises the continuity of his philosophical project,

rather than any turning in his philosophical work away from human existence as the route for the meaning of Being. Agamben uses Heideggerean ontology as a means of interrogating the bare life of human existence as a life without any definition, which can be appropriated as a form of redemption. Such an interpretation refuses the elements of a phenomenological hermeneutics within Heidegger's early work. The ontology contained within the descriptions of the lifeworld is of no interest to Agamben's fundamental ontology of Being, which is read through a human existence, but only a human existence as emptiness itself, bare life. This is the ultimate lack of any materialism within Agamben's concepts of potentiality and life. Such a critique, though, returns us to elements within a phenomenological ontology as embodiment which Adorno's work lacks. Such an account of embodied experience will not be a naturalistic ground per se, but a ground that is itself historicised through a dialectic of nature and history, as outlined in Adorno's central methodological idea of natural history, that the historical must be read as natural, and the natural as historical.

The first chapter, on Auschwitz, situates the problem of life and experience in terms of the life that is produced by the event named "Auschwitz". Adorno's philosophical method in terms of both constructing and denying a universal history is the central theme for this initial chapter. I want to take seriously the thought that Auschwitz reveals a certain form of death-in-life which then compromises all life and experience afterwards, but I also want to deny this as a universal history that culminates in catastrophe. Thinking Auschwitz means thinking this event as the revelation of a certain new depth that life can plunge into, but not reifying it

as culmination of history. My critique of Adorno and various other thinkers is the critique that this philosophical representation of Auschwitz as catastrophic culmination, or negative completion of history, inaugurates a crisis for experience that has no end, and thus becomes meaningless as crisis. The attempt to think Auschwitz as the triumph of an immanence of history, as a world in which nothing new can arise, is a powerful attempt to remain faithful to the event, but must be denied at the same time if it is not to become reified as an ahistorical or absolute event.

In the second chapter, I use Agamben's book Remnants of Auschwitz, and its account of the experience of survival to give meaning to the indetermination of life and death in the subject, to what a "life that does not live" may mean in terms of its concrete historical incarnation, an incarnation that Agamben discusses throughout the book with reference to the life in the camps. Agamben's concept of bare life is outlined as not a naturalistic ground but a description of the production of a form of life as an empty space, an indetermination between life and death. Nevertheless, the slippage between a concept of bare life as effect of power and as form of life which can resist power in terms of an ontology of potentiality is also noted here.

The third chapter sets out from the discussion of death-in-life contained in Agamben's work and in Adorno's Negative Dialectics and attempts to understand the concept of a "life that does not live" in terms of what this life is that has been extirpated. There is an examination of the philosophical antecedents of Adorno's thought in terms of Lebensphilosophie, particularly the influence of

Nietzsche and Freud in Adorno's thought. Adorno's concept of damaged life is articulated in relation to his idea of natural history. A concept of life can only be formulated in terms of both its historical and its natural moments, as a mediation between history and nature. Damaged life can point towards a fulfilled life only through its absence.

The fourth chapter considers the project of responding to the disenchantment of nature through a re-enchantment, configured as a re-awakening of modes of relating to life that have been either extirpated in modernity or completely concealed by processes of reification. The most powerful recent interpretation of Adorno's work in such a manner is J.M. Bernstein's book, Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics. I propose a critique of this interpretation of Adorno's use of concepts of life and experience, as it reduces the speculative element of Adorno's thinking. Nevertheless, Adorno does gesture towards a fulfilled concept of experience, both as intellectual and aesthetic experience, but this fulfillment is fundamentally open and speculative rather than natural, although it can occur somatically. I try and articulate what such a notion of a somatic yet speculative experience might be, that is still dissociated from the mechanisms of desire, by an analysis of the concept of shudder in Aesthetic Theory.

Chapter five analyses the accounts given of the decay of experience in modernity by Adorno, Benjamin and Agamben. There is an oscillation in these differing accounts between a traditional and an ontological concept of experience as Erfahrung. Adorno's distinctiveness here is a defence of a Hegelian concept of experience. It is this concept of experience that provides an outline for a mode of

relating between experience and life that can produce new forms of experience beyond Erlebnis and Erfahrung, but only if dependent upon a strong concept of Erfahrung in the first place. The problem for Adorno, is that his account of the destruction of Erfahrung as a form of traditional experience, leaves little opportunity for the "letting go" of subjectivity, which can produce a more fulfilled experience.

Chapter six articulates how this dialectical concept of experience can provide a form of critical subjectivity, that is nevertheless historical and still bound to conceptual models of thinking. The relation between experience and life is a relation of a speculative experience. Such speculative experience, though, relates immanently to a negative dialectical experience of self-reflection. Such a form of self-reflection proceeds through the deepening of contradictions to an awareness of the dependence and conditionality of thought. Thought is dependent on objectivity, both as embodied thought and as a thought modelling itself on the object. I articulate some of the problems of Adorno's account of embodiment in this chapter, and outline how a fuller account of certain terms within Adorno's work such as the auratic, within the context of embodiment, gives an interpretation of the decay of experience, which nevertheless allows for a possibility of life which is not purely transcendent.

Chapter seven analyses how such an experience of life can be possible given the increasing grip that forms of power have on forms of life, particularly in terms of the growth and diffuseness of power as biopower. I relate this fundamental limit experience of a point beyond the current reified context, to concepts of

possibility in Adorno's work and potentiality in Agamben's work. Through their different readings of Aristotle, these concepts of pure possibility orient the two thinkers in different ways towards materialism. I defend Adorno's concept of possibility as a means of providing a standpoint for a critical subjectivity, which relies on an individual experience, but doesn't reduce that experience to a form of inaction itself, but creates a space for the possibility of a different actualisation of subjectivity.

Chapter eight analyses the concept of metaphysical experience, and outlines Adorno's concept of a negative redemptive moment of breakthrough as an opening towards a changed concept of reconciliation, through the description of figures of exhaustion. This is contrasted with Agamben's affirmative concept of redemption. Through this account, I outline a means of moving beyond a "life that does not live" that proceeds immanently but without the affirmation of such a bare life as the remnant that is saved in the time of redemption.

Chapter 1: Auschwitz.

Auschwitz as model of experience

Auschwitz marks a turning point in history for Adorno, a moment that changes fundamentally our relation to both the world and previous ways of theorising the world. Fundamentally, Auschwitz changes the very nature of any affirmative attempt at thinking the absolute, the core of the metaphysical tradition. Adorno's thinking on Auschwitz identifies a particular historical conjuncture as revealing both a trajectory for a certain tradition, particularly, but not exclusively, the German philosophical tradition, and also the starting point for a different mode of conceiving the relation between philosophy, life and history. Auschwitz is a problematic starting point because of the apocalyptic sense of the catastrophe contained in the event of Auschwitz. Auschwitz as catastrophe threatens to consume any critical relation to the event, and to life after this historical convulsion. Adorno's thinking in relation to Auschwitz should be conceived in relation to his phrase in Negative Dialectics, that "universal history must be both constructed and denied".[1] The universal history that is constructed in the form of Auschwitz is in danger of becoming a teleological history that culminates in a catastrophe. This kind of negative teleology would leave us with a dead end for thought. The question of the denial of such a history, is the question of the "damaged life" that survives Auschwitz, and this question is posed through the

changed concept of a speculative experience that Adorno tries to articulate in response to the events named as Auschwitz. The extreme dialectical tension posed by the question of Auschwitz is that between the thought of a negative realisation of history in an event which consumes and destroys a tradition leaving it with no grounds for recuperation, alongside the denial of such a negative realisation through a materialist metaphysics, that will emphasise modes of living which can point beyond the current immanent historical context. In this opening chapter I want to consider this dialectical tension that Adorno poses. The problem with Adorno's thinking of Auschwitz is that it tends towards the absolutisation of an indeterminate event which then becomes overdetermining as an end to history, an end to philosophical discourse or artistic representation. Readings such as this will ultimately end up in a metaphysics of Auschwitz, rather than a metaphysics beyond Auschwitz. One of the virtues of Giorgio Agamben's book Remnants of Auschwitz is its thinking through the context of life after Auschwitz as both a continuation and a historical break, a form of thought which would remain true to the dialectical tension in the thought of Auschwitz, without either hypostasising Auschwitz as event which stands outside history, or as event which can be easily assimilated and assuaged within a historical narrative of enlightenment, however tortured and tortuous that narrative may have become.

The problems inherent in the apocalyptic reading of Auschwitz are already contained within Adorno's analysis. It is not at all clear why Adorno identifies this particular moment in history, or even what Auschwitz the name denotes for Adorno. In Negative Dialectics, Auschwitz serves as the name representing the

systematic, planned and technologically executed genocide of the Jews during the Second World War by the Nazis, with the covert or overt co-operation of the German people. More importantly, it represents the logical outcome of a certain tendency within Western philosophical and social thought that Adorno terms "identity thinking". Auschwitz confirms the general trend of Western thinking, which is comprised of a totalising urge to integrate all difference under the self-preserving and subsuming identity of the concept. The Nazi genocide occurs as a practical culmination of a German culture which has instantiated a form of identity thinking which led to the rationalisations of a totalising but discriminate slaughter, which classifies, rationalises, and makes each individual life replaceable and exchangeable with another. For Adorno, this process is at one with a drive within capitalism for abstraction, exchangeability and identification. In Negative Dialectics, he is not concerned with locating a specific German context of anti-Semitism, or even a history of anti-Semitism within German philosophy, but rather with the paralysis caused to a tradition of German philosophy by an act that in some senses can be read as a logical outcome of that tradition:

> "Our metaphysical faculty is paralysed because actual events have shattered the basis on which speculative thought could be reconciled with experience".[2]

The starting point for Adorno's reflections is how a changed experience may affect the process of a speculative thinking, and the effect is framed in the strong terms of a reconciliation. His depiction of the historical conjuncture is lacking, and

there could be many arguments postulated for the weakness of an argument that is never proffered, as to why Auschwitz, or why, only Auschwitz ? Adorno appears singularly uninterested in this argument. Auschwitz serves as a model of experience, which is pertinent personally to him and the tradition from which he is writing and serves as an extreme instantiation of a certain result of enlightenment progress. Adorno can be interpreted as arguing that a history of domination has culminated in a catastrophic genocide that was inevitable given the structures of thought and institutions inherent in modern capitalism. He appears to recognize the problem of interpreting history in such a way, when he writes in Minima Moralia that "the recent past always presents itself as destroyed by catastrophes".[3] Auschwitz serves as a revelation of a latent potential within capitalism, a revelation that catastrophises history, in the sense that what is revealed is worse than could have been imagined. This is not then a determinism of history in the sense of a culmination of a process which inevitably led to this juncture, but a caesura which reveals a latent meaning in all that has gone before.

It is clear then that Adorno's emphasis on the model of Auschwitz is not an argument about the historical uniqueness of the Holocaust in terms of its status as an historical event, but relates to the metaphysical status of Auschwitz. Bob Brecher has outlined two types of uniqueness claims about the Holocaust.[4] First, there is the historical claim to uniqueness which rests on the claim that what occurred at Auschwitz is a unique historical event, which has never been seen before and could not be envisaged again, an event that is literally incomparable. The evidence for such a claim is supplied through the numbers killed, or the

technology of the extermination, or the particular state apparatus that directed the genocide. This is not the main claim that Adorno makes, although certain aspects of the new paradigms revealed by the Nazi genocide are important for his argument. The second claim to uniqueness, according to Brecher is the conceptual claim, or what could be termed more accurately, the metaphysical claim about Auschwitz, that it serves as a revelation of a latent possibility within Western culture and, at the same time, the death of any positive claims from that culture.

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe has expressed the idea of a caesura that occurs due to the revelation that Auschwitz serves as the expression of a "metaphysical decision".[5] The caesura is " ... that which, within history, interrupts history and opens up another possibility of history, or else closes off all possibility of history".[6] Everything hangs on this "or else". The caesura of Auschwitz is the event that threatens to close off all possibilities for history, and in this sense serves as an interruption and a beginning, but a beginning of what ?

Speculative Paralysis

Alexander García Düttmann, in The Memory of Thought, reflects on the peculiar interruption of history that the name "Auschwitz" introduces in Adorno's work. This is an interruption that is both an inauguration and an instantiation at the same time. Auschwitz is an instantiation of a negative totality of history, a teleology that leads to a catastrophe, rather than an account of the progress of history towards a utopia of human freedom. It is also an inauguration in the sense

that Auschwitz is thought of as the catastrophe that prefigures the worse that is to come, an event that changes the relationship of humans to their own life and puts history on a course to disaster.

On this reading, Auschwitz is an "absolute event", an event that puts everything at stake but also consumes itself at the same time as an event, an event that cannot be represented. Auschwitz lies at the end of a process of western thought and practice as the event that negatively puts an end to an idea of enlightenment progress, and inaugurates a survival of a form of life to come, a form of life which will put into question the very definition of life itself. The distinctiveness of this event is the inability to represent the event itself, to encapsulate what has happened, and thus the importance for Düttmann, of the "memory of thought":

> "To the extent that an event is a destruction and an opening, and that it cannot be (re) presented as an event, thought is memory, the memory of a destruction, of an opening, of a guilt which always exceeds the memory of thought".[7]

The problem with the thinking of Auschwitz as "absolute event", is that it dissolves completely into a metaphysical or ontological event, rather than an event in historical time. As absolute event, Auschwitz becomes that which completes history in its erasure and destruction, it becomes the event which as destruction destroys any sense of a tradition, or the remnant of a tradition to be handed over. Düttmann's reading is certainly faithful to one element in Adorno's dialectical thinking of Auschwitz, one pole of the dialectic. This pole is the negative and

catastrophic completion of Auschwitz as an event which cannot be represented or reconciled with experience, an event that hovers above history. Auschwitz becomes a Name, which represents emptily but completely the unrepresentable, a metaphysical name.

The process of both a destruction and an opening is the process of tradition, but the peculiarity of the event of Auschwitz is the impossibility of a representation of such an event, which then involves thought as a form of remembering, of surviving, of bearing witness, rather than a new mode of life. The question of a life after Auschwitz cannot be posed in these terms, even as a survival, in the sense that the absolute event consumes any thinking of life in historical or natural terms. However, the starting point in this thought of Auschwitz is a reversal of Adorno's starting point in that it begins with the metaphysical as linguistic, Auschwitz as "Name", rather than the experiential. It is the experiential question that drives Adorno's initial problematic, that a speculative thought cannot be reconciled with experience.

The paralysis that results from Auschwitz is very much an experiential paralysis that inflects any metaphysical thinking. It is experiential primarily because it results in two modes of experience, those of despair and guilt, and opens onto the possibility of a plane of experience which is at the same time non-experience, or a form of living death, which is that of totalised immanence. Despair comes about through a realisation that the forms of metaphysical thinking that previously gave a meaning to life cannot be thought any longer given the context of Auschwitz. Any form of thinking that attempted to extract positive significance

from the meaning of a world (ultimately positive significance from Auschwitz) would be a lie and would not do justice to the irrevocable nature of the event or events thereby named.

Auschwitz serves as a particular historical conjuncture that interrupts and fundamentally changes notions of the universal. This interplay between notions of universality and particularity in relation to an event, "Auschwitz", which is not really an event, as it describes a series of events that are gathered under the name "Auschwitz", is highly problematic. Adorno is raising a universal claim based around a particular historical juncture, which is in accordance with a notion of the temporal nature of truth, but it is the extremity of the consequences of this particular historical conjuncture, and the universalizing of those consequences, that tends towards a reification of the name "Auschwitz", as something that stands beyond or outside history. It is this tension between Auschwitz as something unique and unrepresentable, and yet within history that threatens the philosophical sense of the use of Auschwitz, but, at the same time, renders the thinking of Auschwitz important.

In his book, Heidegger and "the jews", Lyotard immediately universalizes the situation of the Nazi extermination of the Jews, by using the lower case name "the jews", which refers to a particular non-place of the otherness of Western thought. In this sense, "the jews" represent not only Jewish people or the Jewish tradition, but also everything that is masked by identity thinking, the non-identical:

" ... 'the jews', never at home wherever they are, cannot be integrated, converted

or expelled. They are also always away from home when they are at home, in their so-called own tradition, because it includes exodus as its beginning, excision, impropriety and respect for the forgotten".[8]

Lyotard is aware of the dangers of his position, of the possibility of the marking of a tradition for its own destiny of annihilation through its very otherness, but despite acknowledging this, the use of "the jews" in this sense universalises the situation of the Nazi genocide to an unacceptable degree, as the particularity of the extermination of the Jews becomes lost. For Lyotard, the major project of the Nazis was just this radical excision of otherness, of non-identity, through the extermination of its representatives. This explains the excess of Nazi politics, an excess that Primo Levi refers to as "useless violence", an excess that involves hunting down to the last person in an extermination, which continues even when defeat is acknowledged.[9]

Lyotard refers to Adorno's determination not to make Auschwitz into an "episode", not relegating Auschwitz to something that can be passed over and easily encompassed within moral or philosophical frameworks. Thinking about Auschwitz is a thinking about the unthinkable, because Auschwitz was an attempt to annihilate the very resource for thought itself, that radical otherness, non-identity, without which thought cannot exist. This is why, for Adorno, the question of living after Auschwitz, becomes the crucial formulation, as life refers to the moment of nature within his thinking of natural history. The project of a dialectical thought of the natural within the historical and the historical within the

natural is threatened by an event such as Auschwitz, which excises any resources for thinking the non-identical within the philosophical tradition. It does this because the thinking of an identity thinking is the philosophical representation of the excision of the non-identical that is carried out in practical terms by the Nazi genocide of the Jews. This is not to claim some crass causal effect, but a deep cultural analogy between forms of conceptual thought and the claims to truth and freedom within that tradition, that are completely eroded by the experience of surviving Auschwitz. Any form of thinking that relegates Auschwitz to an episode within thought contains it within an identifying procedure that does not acknowledge the radical excision of thought which lies at the root of the Nazi project. Thought must remain in the "abyss", in order to struggle "not to continue along its representational line but to approach what it has not been able to think".[10]

In The Differend, Lyotard argues that Auschwitz serves as a model for Adorno, and he describes a model in the following way:

> " ... the model is the name for a kind of para-experience, where dialectics would encounter a non-negatable negative ... and would abide in the impossibility of redoubling that negative into a 'result'."[11]

What does it mean for there to be a non-negatable negative, other than that there can be no thought at all, if thought operates through the determinate negation of its material ? This would fully articulate the nature of paralysis that it is not even

possible to think speculatively about Auschwitz, as the very concepts that we would use to think about such an event are called into question by the event or the model. As Lyotard argues:

> "The 'Auschwitz' model would designate an 'experience' of language that brings speculative discourse to a halt. The latter can no longer be pursued 'after Auschwitz'. Here is a name 'within' which speculative discourse would not take place."[12]

Lyotard questions whether the model of "Auschwitz" serves as an anonym for the process of negative dialectics, and if so he argues that the only result can be "the despair of nihilism". After Auschwitz, speculative thought will only be able to consume its material without result, in an endless process of the production of waste matter:

> "So must be spoken the end of the infinite, as the endless repetition of Nichtige, as the 'bad infinity'. We wanted the progress of the mind, we got its shit."[13]

For Lyotard, Auschwitz becomes the name for a destruction of experience, as an experience can only come from a form of thinking which has a result, and this is precisely what does not occur with the model of Auschwitz. This model thus puts a stop to the operation of speculative thought, paralyses that thought, leaving it with no direction or mode of progress. However, Lyotard again emphasises one

element in the thinking of Auschwitz, its unthinkability as historical event. This is a tendency within Adorno's thought, but this tendency is elucidated in order to be denied. This is the extreme form of Adorno's dialectical parataxis. Auschwitz must be thought both as the destructive ending, but also related historically to what occurred before and after its occurrence, namely in relation to experience and life after Auschwitz.

As Auschwitz serves as the beginning rather than the end of the "Meditations on Metaphysics" in Negative Dialectics there must be some mode of beginning to think in this destruction of experience. How can this erasure produce a new form of thinking ? For Adorno, this thinking must occur in an experiential mode and despair is not the only experiential result, but there is also guilt, the specific guilt of the survivor, who through a statistical procedure reckons his or her survival as against the overwhelming numbers of those dead, and this guilt too feeds into despair, the despair of not being able to go on living due to the paralysis of guilt. In a characteristic reversal, Adorno claims that this situation compels us to philosophise. How this philosophising can take place is the question of the relation of thinking a constellation of a number of different elements, primarily the relation between the "damaged life" of survival after Auschwitz, and a speculative experience that can move beyond the current immanent context.

In Heidegger and "the jews", Lyotard gives a definition of what he understands this form of philosophy to be, which builds on the argument outlined above:

"If there is 'dialectics' then, this inevitable fashion of occidental thought, it is

> negative dialectics, not only because its movement does not get resolved in a Resultat, in a work, but because it does not affect moments, 'formations', entities that will have been here and now and can, in this future perfect, be collected in the Erinnerung, the memory that interiorises. This movement affects what cannot be interiorised, represented and memorized".[14]

Lyotard refers to a primary experience of the unconscious that takes the form of a "shock without affect", a shock that does not become processed, but that is always present in its displaced effects, despite never being interiorised, and that is forgotten but always there, without being represented. He writes of a primary repression that is not assimilated by the organism, and cannot be represented by the subject. Any form of critical thinking about the origins of thought, about the resource for thought must be a form of thinking about what cannot be remembered but must not be forgotten, this radical otherness at the origin of thought. This account relates to Auschwitz as it is precisely that which cannot be thought but is remembered, in an interminable "search for lost time", which is an acknowledgement of the vulnerability and fallibility of thought in general. To remember Auschwitz is to engage in this task of thinking the unthinkable, of :

> " ... time lost yet always there, a revelation that never reveals itself but remains there, a misery: and that this misfortune, this soul, is the very motive of thought, of research, of anamnesis ... a motive lost in the very principle of progress, soul lost in the spirit."[15]

There is an interesting reversal in Lyotard's thinking here, as in an earlier essay entitled "Adorno as Devil", he had criticized Adorno's thinking for its negative theological trappings, for its belief in an underlying reconciliation which could not yet be captured by thought, yet the above quotation appears to be the very essence of negative theology, as it puts it faith in a perennially absent motive as the driving force for thinking.[16] Just as a negative theology traces God's attributes through the absence of such attributes in the world, Lyotard's invocation of Auschwitz operates as a negative theology, in that, for Lyotard, the misery of Auschwitz cannot be represented or formalised, but only invoked as an absence which drives thought. The difference in this negative theology is that what cannot be discerned in the world is not the attributes of a divine being, but the motive for thought itself, a motive that is extirpated by Auschwitz. There is a confusion as to what is extirpated here. In one interpretation, what Auschwitz removes is that non-identity to identifying thought which is the very motor of thought itself. At the other pole, what is impossible to discern is that very process of destruction itself as Auschwitz, that is impossible to represent or come to terms with. The fissure between these two interpretations is the experiential one of a notion of suffering which registers a protest against both the extirpation of the non-identical and the destruction itself. It is this concept of a speculative yet bodily experience of suffering that characterises the experience for Adorno of a survival that is a perpetual demand on thought to respond to its own unrest that remains without being directly representable. For Adorno, the response then is not only an

anamnesis, or a Proustian recovery of lost time, but a material and experiential response to suffering, which is a response that cannot be lived directly. In this sense, Adorno's thought is less negatively theological than Lyotard's formulation, as for Lyotard, the absent motive for thought has no material trace.

Lyotard argues that Auschwitz cannot be made into an episode, something that can be fitted into humanistic and political discourses without some remainder of incomprehensibility. This form of episodic thinking is captured well by Derrida in a conversation with Jean Luc-Nancy, as a form of thinking which serves only to give the speaker a "good conscience"[17]. As we will see later, this form of thinking emphasises the opposite dialectical pole of Adorno's thoughts on universal history, a form of thinking that too easily relates Auschwitz to its historical milieu. This form of thinking relates Auschwitz to other crimes against humanity, discusses and represents it in terms of the dreadful nature of the deed, but does nothing to approach the quality and particularity of the event itself. This relates to the question of the representation, particularly but not exclusively the artistic representation of Auschwitz. Lyotard argues that this representation of Auschwitz in words and images serves to make us forget rather than remember, because that which is not to be forgotten is unrepresentable. Baudrillard has referred to the proliferation of discourses about and stemming from Auschwitz, which serve as a mechanism for an industry of forgetting or an easy knowledge, and that even the attempt at a form of silence is no longer possible:

"Even the type of sociohistorical dimension that still remained forgotten in the

form of guilt, of shameful latency, of the not-said, no longer exists because now 'everyone knows'; everyone has trembled and bawled in the face of extermination."[18]

However, there are other options for thinking through the injunction upon the impossibility of writing after Auschwitz. First, it is important to return to the text in which Adorno discusses writing after Auschwitz, an essay entitled "Cultural Criticism and Society".[19] The essay is a reflection on the history and current status of cultural criticism and its relationship to both culture and society. It proceeds through a highly complex series of dialectical inversions based around the trope of the separation between intellectual and physical labour. For Adorno, what is at stake with the practice of cultural criticism is the attempt to understand and construct the truth moment in culture, without reifying that truth as a product independent of society and history. Cultural truth becomes both dependent upon society for its resonance but independent in the sense that it represents something that escapes from the total commodification of late capitalist society. The need for cultural criticism is due to the fact that culture does not provide its meaning through conceptual terms alone and therefore its truth will always demand yet escape reconstruction. Cultural criticism is the necessary correlate to any culture, in that it reconstructs conceptually the truth content of the work of art. The theme of the essay is this complex dialectic of culture and barbarism, of the difficulty of the separation of a moment of cultural criticism of an art object, which will at the same time not reify that object, but relate to the society from which it is

produced, whilst not being completely compromised itself as an act of cultural criticism, into simply becoming a mode of pricing the cultural market. Adorno gives a description of the dialectical method involved:

> "It must relate the knowledge of society as a totality and of the mind's involvement in it to the claim inherent in the specific content of the object that it be apprehended as such. Dialectics cannot, therefore, permit any insistence on logical neatness to encroach on its right to go from one *genus* to another, to shed light on an object in itself hermetic by casting a glance at society, to present society with the bill which the object does not redeem."[20]

The difficulty of an immanent critique of culture in the sense described above, is the total commodification and reification of modern consumer society, which does not allow a position in which to perform such a delicate dialectical task. Society is then confronted with a final stage of the dialectic between culture and barbarism, as the individual attempts to escape the reification of the mind through an act of intellectual separation which in itself reifies the act of cultural criticism. It is at this point that Adorno writes about poetry and Auschwitz in the following way:

> "Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry

today."[21]

Adorno's statement is therefore twofold, but only one of these statements is argued for in the foregoing essay. The impossibility of writing poetry today is presumably due to the very dialectic of culture and barbarism that Adorno has spent the essay diagnosing. Poetry is perhaps being used as the paradigmatic art, the purest form of intellectual labour, which has become impossible due to the gradual colonising of the mind by the values of exchange and abstraction. The barbarism of writing poetry after Auschwitz is not explained. It is not even an injunction, as many took it to be, just a bald statement of supposed fact. For writers to use this statement as a ban on all writing after Auschwitz is therefore an extreme step to take. The most useful way of thinking through this statement would be to think about what Adorno means when he writes that we have reached the final stage of the dialectic between culture and barbarism, and how this affects writing. Adorno's reflection on his own injunction after reading Paul Celan's poem "Todesfugue" is an example of how the injunction should not be read as a ban, but only a requirement that any artistic achievement that attempts to wrestle with the subject of Auschwitz, must do so through the realisation that the artistic form used will be irrevocably transformed by the attempt. Adorno modified his supposed injunction after reading Celan`s poetry, but then poses an equally challenging, but less cultural formulation of the question of existence after Auschwitz in Negative Dialectics:

"Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems. But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living ... "[22]

Adorno's thought moves here to the reflection on how a process of survival after Auschwitz, particularly the survival of a person who escaped the genocide, can be justified experientially and ethically.

Günter Grass has argued in "Writing after Auschwitz" that Adorno's comments on poetry and Auschwitz were misunderstood as a prohibition, when they needed to be read as a standard by which any writing should be measured before writing could begin.[23] Grass writes from a different perspective to Adorno, still the perspective of a survivor, but a survivor of a different hue, not someone who escaped the camps by chance but a survivor of the "camp of criminals", someone who had been in the Nazi youth, whose parents and grandparents had participated in the Nazi experiment. The prerequisite to writing after Auschwitz had become shame, rather than the guilt of the survivor that Adorno describes. Grass describes the process of a writer trying to write within the condition of this final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism:

"Where can literature still find an outlet if the future has already been dated, the terrible statistical bottom line calculated ? What is left to narrate if the human race's capacity for destroying itself and all other life in a multitude of

ways is proven daily and practiced in computer simulations ?"[24]

For Grass, the answer is to write about exactly this situation, to attempt to continue what he terms, the "crippled project of the Enlightenment." The irony for Grass was that an engagement with Adorno's thinking did not produce a lack of writing but a massive fictional trilogy. For Grass, writing after Auschwitz is endless "unless the human race gives up on itself completely." Writing from the perspective of 1990, Grass terms Auschwitz a "permanent stigma", but also, a "positive gain", in that understanding Auschwitz enabled us to understand ourselves.[25] The problem with Grass's conclusion here is that it emphasises the pole of relating Auschwitz to its historical afterlife in too banal a way. To refer to Auschwitz as a "positive gain" dissolves the event into a history of enlightenment, which does not take into account the relation between such a history and Auschwitz itself. Auschwitz becomes elevated and recuperated through a larger narrative that as a systematic narrative contains within itself forms of identity thinking, which were compromised by the event of Auschwitz. Thus, Grass emphasises the pole of denying a negative universal history, only by re-instantiating a positive universal history.

Auschwitz as philosophical representation

What these writings don't take into account is the question of the philosophical representation of Auschwitz, of what is the philosophical discourse when the

writing is a writing of the unrepresentable, a thinking of the unthinkable, particularly, as this unthinkable is universalized as a condition, an origin or a form of ending. The philosophical representation aims to remain true to a certain particularity of the event, but always relates that event to either a transcendental condition of human existence, or a fundamental caesura in human existence. Does this thinking turn Auschwitz into an episode, or does it remain faithful to a particular extremity of the event itself ? What is the status of this philosophical representation that forbids all other representation ?

Jacques Derrida, in an essay entitled "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy", discusses a certain tone in philosophical texts relating to an apocalyptic writing or a writing of the apocalypse:

> "Among the numerous traits characterising an apocalyptic type of writing, let us provisionally isolate prediction and eschatological preaching, the fact of telling, foretelling or preaching the ends, the extreme limit, the imminence of the last".[26]

This discourse on the end of philosophy or the imminence of the end, which Derrida admits he too has been involved with, is not a new phenomenon. He situates his essay in response to an essay by Kant, who himself denounces those who try to put an end to philosophy, but in so doing, Kant, himself marks a limit, an ending which then becomes a boundary to be crossed:

" ... he (Kant) has himself in marking a limit, indeed the end of a certain type of metaphysics, freed another wave of eschatological discourses in philosophy."[27]

Seen in this light, Adorno's supposed ban on "writing after" Auschwitz has itself freed an avalanche of philosophical discourses alone on the subject. Derrida writes of philosophers wearing an apocalyptic tone, which then adds an aura of truth and significance to the reading of the apocalyptic runes:

"The end is beginning, signifies the apocalyptic tone ... The end is soon, it is imminent, signifies the tone ... We're all going to die, we're going to disappear ... I'm the only one able to reveal to you the truth or the destination ... let us be for a moment the sole survivors, the only ones to stay awake."[28]

All the tropes that are present in the philosophical writing that has been examined, of survival, of the imminence of a total reification, of a necessity for a form of reflection, a form of "staying awake", are parodically reflected here by Derrida. The interesting claim is that a tone in philosophy can augur more than it really represents, or perhaps the recourse to tone is because of the alleged impossibility of representation. Derrida then makes the characteristic, but rather less interesting move, of making a transcendental claim for apocalyptic discourse, that all discourse is apocalyptic in some way, in that apocalyptic writing reveals a general structure of all discourse, that one does not know who speaks or who listens. The parodic intent of the essay is interesting, because there does appear to

be such a tone in all these writings, and when the truth that is to be unveiled appears it is very elusive, perhaps understandably so.

Klaus R. Scherpe argues that the specific effect of this apocalyptic thinking that commenced with Auschwitz and continued through different imaginings of nuclear catastrophe, and ecological disaster (and one might add post-9/11 musings), is that within post-modernity there has been a particular "de-dramatisation" of the Apocalypse, or the end, caused by the very producibility of catastrophes.[29] The peculiar problem of post-modernity is an aesthetic assimilation of apocalyptic thinking, which does not assume that the end is imminent but that it has already been, and that results in a form of "playing with the apocalypse."[30] Scherpe recognises that this form of thinking was already prevalent within modernism, particularly in the thinking of Benjamin's conception of the angel of history, and of the catastrophe already happening. However, Benjamin's difference is the possibility of a revolutionary rupture within this history of catastrophe, a caesura that would inaugurate new possibilities for history. This difference between two types of apocalyptic thinking, one that dates between the two world wars, and is indebted to the thinking of Benjamin and Bloch, and emphasises both the destructive and the redemptive moment of catastrophe, and the post-war apocalyptic thinking that is more sober and concerned regarding the closing down of all possibility is the thematic of Rabinbach's book on apocalyptic thought.[31] According to Scherpe, the philosophical thinking inaugurated by the reflections on Auschwitz results in a form of postmodern thinking about the catastrophe, or the numerous producible catastrophes, which can only come to be a matter of indifference.[32]

Postmodern apocalyptic thinking contains two moments both of which are bequeathed to it from modernism. The first is that of Benjamin, and that retains the shock of the catastrophe that can inaugurate the possibility of something revolutionary. The second moment is that of Jünger, and is characterised as the "non-dramatic observation of a permanent catastrophe."[33] The post-modern encapsulates a thinking of a "pure and self-sufficient catastrophe", without the necessity of "expecting an event that will alter or end history."[34] This form of thinking about the apocalypse eventually serves the death knell for any form of critical thinking. Although he doesn't mention Adorno by name (there is a discussion of Mann's Dr. Faustus in the essay which mentions Adorno by implication), the idea that Adorno's reflections on Auschwitz have eventually reversed themselves into a thinking of the apocalypse which anaesthetises thinking is a worrying irony. Scherpe describes the situation in the following way:

> "The notion of 'It will have happened', with which one imagines a retrospective look at a future that will never occur and that cannot be achieved, certainly not as a utopia, produces the aesthetic consciousness of 'distance' and 'indifference' that sounds the death knell for critical thinking in terms of negation, anticipation and causal connections."[35]

What is at stake in this penetrating essay is the legacy of a certain thinking about Auschwitz, and the stake is metaphysical, in the sense that Auschwitz as the event that consumes itself as an event, the event that puts a stop to all speculative

thinking, can produce itself a form of catastrophic indifference which anaesthetises critical thinking. The relation between speculative and critical thought is tense and complex in Adorno's thinking of Auschwitz. An immanent critique of capitalist society and its structures loses its foothold with the event of Auschwitz, which questions even the methodology of critique, such as a process of negation and of attempting to link and understand Auschwitz to other events in terms of the causes and meaning of its occurrence. The excess of such an event inaugurates the possibility of a life in which critique would be impossible, as all the traditional avenues for meaning and critique have been closed down. One response to this is to persist with an element of an immanent critique that realises that its foundations are not secure. That is not to say that the conclusion to any thinking about Auschwitz is just some kind of Sisyphean continuation of the project of enlightenment, as if the project of enlightenment were not implicated in Auschwitz to its core, but can be continued with regardless. Rabinbach's conclusion to his book is that:

> " ... contemporary thought can continue to exist only in the awareness of how the burdened traditions of modernity remain stranded between apocalypse and enlightenment."[36]

This is obviously true, but does not point a way forward for thought that must survive Auschwitz, and attempt to move beyond this point of being stranded. However, the attempt to move beyond the immanent context can only occur

through a transcendent thinking, a speculative thinking, but this speculation must be tied to the material if it is not to become a form of thinking which bans all thought and representation in relation to Auschwitz. The relation between critical thinking and speculative thinking is negative, in that the critical apprehension of the historical event of Auschwitz, in terms of its political, historical and cultural antecedents and meaning, always calls forth an excess of meaning which cannot then be hypostasised as metaphysical in itself. To hypostasise this excess as completely other would be the form of speculative thinking about Auschwitz, which maintains it as an event without relation. Speculative thought is called for by the very inability of experience to reconcile itself to the events named by Auschwitz, by the possibility that Auschwitz prefigures an event and a form of life in which all possibilities for a life beyond the reified context of contemporary capitalism are closed down. Therefore, although the situation of contemporary capitalist society still calls forth an immanent response of critique in the sense that the capitalist mode and relations of production does not provide the equality and freedom it purports to through concepts such as the exchange of equivalents, the excess of an event such as Auschwitz which cannot even be comprehended within the dynamics of capitalism, means that the concepts underlying such an immanent critique are themselves at stake, concepts such as freedom, life and experience.

Silence and Auschwitz

David Carroll has discussed an attitude of "piety" with regards to philosophical writing on Auschwitz.[37] This piety turns Auschwitz into a "moral-religious" absolute that dogmatically aims to silence those who wish to write or think about the subject. This pietistic attitude grants authority to the writer to speak of the event, but not for others, and even decrees the "proper silence" in relation to the subject. Carroll's main target in this is Adorno, and Adorno's infamous misquoted pronouncement on the writing of poetry after Auschwitz. However, as a statement it could just as easily be appended to the text that follows the foreword, Lyotard's Heidegger and "the jews". Lyotard specifically writes about different kinds of silence about Auschwitz, a silence which approaches the unthinkability of the event in an attempt to think it, but always fails and the "mute" silence of those, like Heidegger, who refused to write or speak about the event. Carroll accurately diagnoses a form of piety, but it is something intrinsic and common to all the philosophical discourses on Auschwitz that have been examined here. The attempt to come to terms with the unthinkability of Auschwitz acknowledges the "unreadability" of the event, the fact that the more it is examined the more it is impossible to attribute metaphysical or ethical significance to something that escapes such significance. Primo Levi, in The Drowned and the Saved, refers to "The Grey Zone", where all ethical judgements are suspended, particularly when examining the roles of various prisoners who took on roles as camp functionaries.[38] Levi is clear that this grey zone, which revolves around the issues of bearing witness, of the Muselmann, and of camp "collaborators", does not mean that all ethical judgements are suspended with regard to Auschwitz, but that the

camps brought into existence forms of life that precisely in their instantiation blur previous ethical and metaphysical boundaries and discourses.[39] Levi's work is exemplary in attempting to hold to a critical sensibility, and refusing any discourse, which bans discussion or representation of Auschwitz. He was acutely aware that in his discussion of the concept of the "Grey Zone", and the roles of the Sonderkommando in the camps there was a danger of an equivalence of guilt which could be interpreted from the Nazi use of concentration camp inhabitants to carry out the acts of genocide. Levi argues that ethical judgements about who organised and implemented such a situation are not compromised by an examination of the world produced by such organisation. It is the world of the concentration camp itself that suspends ethical judgement but we can still judge those who created such a world.

For Lacoue-Labarthe and Lyotard, who have both written of the metaphysical significance of Auschwitz in similar ways to Adorno, the very possibility of speculative thought, or any form of dialectics is impossible after Auschwitz. Lacoue-Labarthe puts it in the following way:

> "When Adorno spoke of accompanying metaphysics in the moment of its fall, there was still – leaving out of account a justified solidarity with philosophy – something 'voluntaristic' in the very grandeur of the gesture ...We must no longer have the desire to philosophise."[40]

This final statement of Lacoue-Labarthe is qualified in a note that states that this philosophy is not a quietism or a nihilism, but a form of resistance. For Adorno, this capitulation to a time without philosophy, would in a sense be a capitulation to barbarism, despite the culpability of philosophical thinking in the catastrophe of Auschwitz. The de-dramatisation that Scherpe diagnoses would leave us in a situation of a lack of resistance to the history that continues despite the end of history, the history of capitalist production and its cultural and economic forms, a history which, in itself, threatens to become ahistorical, or a historical immanence, in the sense that it conceives of itself as a permanent state. Can we conceive of a form of philosophical thinking that enables resistance, but dispenses with metaphysics, or is the form of negatively dialectical thinking that produces a metaphysical experience the only possibility of a form of utopian thinking within late modernity ? The constellation of concepts that are produced from these reflections on Auschwitz results in the relation of a changed form of life and a changed concept of speculation, alongside the need for critique to reconcile experience with itself. This reconciliation is not a consolatory reconciliation, but a reconciliation that calls for change in the sense that, without change, there is the possibility that Auschwitz might occur again. The imperative never to repeat Auschwitz means that critical thinking reflects upon the very resources for its critique, concepts such as freedom, truth and possibility, concepts that have become distorted through the forms of life created by the camps.

The dialectic I have traced through this chapter in the philosophical reception of Auschwitz has been between a critique that relates Auschwitz historically to a

certain larger philosophy of history (a philosophy of history as enlightenment), and the account of Auschwitz that argues that it is without relation, and, thus, suspends it above history. Auschwitz becomes either an aberration, or an absolute exception. Adorno's thinking also has a philosophy of history to which Auschwitz relates (the dialectic of enlightenment), and although there is a tendency to flatten out the dialectic to read it as a negative form of enlightenment history, a transition that culminates in the catastrophe of Auschwitz, what I have done in this chapter is to take seriously the conception of Auschwitz as both an exception, which in some sense must be related to what comes before and after it. Admittedly, the very name Auschwitz, in its philosophical and also its historical usage tends towards a reification, an examination of the genocide through a name which encapsulates a multitude of different acts and intentions. In this sense, one is tempted to state that the name causes more difficulties than it solves, and refuse to use it in the same sense as the term 'Holocaust' is refused because of its negative connotations.[41] However, the question posed by Adorno as to life after Auschwitz, the possibility of living, and what it means to be alive in the sense of an experience that can move beyond the context of a life totally governed in its forms and responses by power, is the question that these reflections on Auschwitz lead into.

The philosopher who has developed Adorno's thinking on Auschwitz and on survival, life and death after Auschwitz most recently is Giorgio Agamben. Agamben specifically configures his thinking within the Adornian terms of the possibility of living after Auschwitz, but his philosophical trajectory is also openly hostile towards dialectics. A comparison of Adorno and Agamben's thinking after

Auschwitz on philosophical experience may clarify which offers a more fruitful approach to avoiding the flattened indifference that Scherpe diagnoses, and would offer a refuge for critical thinking. That refuge must begin, post-Auschwitz, in the concepts of survival and bare life.

Chapter 2: Survival and Bare Life

The Muselmann: Human and Inhuman

The concept of survival is a central theme in Agamben's book on Auschwitz. For Agamben, the paradigmatic figure in the camps is the Muselmann, the figure of the camp inmate who has given up on life, who has become reduced to a form of "bare life", which is merely existing. This figure represents the extreme limit point of the meeting of the human and the non-human within the surviving biological body. The Muselmänner were those camp inhabitants who had been reduced to the lowest level of existence, whose sole form of existence was based around their food and getting their next meal, and who had reached a stage of an inability to communicate on any level with other prisoners. They were universally shunned, and invariably were selected for extermination rapidly. They were labelled as Muslims, due to a stereotyped view of Muslim adherents having a fatalistic and passive view of life.

The Muselmann has several important implications for Agamben. First, in an echo of Adorno, this figure confirms that in Auschwitz there is now something worse than death, a form of existence that is created that is beyond all previous imagining, and that creates a form of death in life:

"The atrocious news that the survivors carry from the camps to the land of the human beings is that it is possible to lose dignity and decency beyond imagination, that there is still life in the most extreme degradation. And this new knowledge now becomes the touchstone by which to judge and measure all morality and all dignity."[1]

Agamben is articulating Adorno's thought that Auschwitz instantiates a new and changed relation to all metaphysical thoughts of human significance. The relation to death has been a fundamental category of metaphysical thought, whether that was in relation to ideas of immortality or ideas of a death that is one's own, or whether it is through death as the opening up of a horizon of possibility. The experience of death in the camps gives the lie to all these thoughts, as the point between life and death is precisely blurred, it becomes impossible to know when death comes, as the ending of a life can occur within the biological span of a life. This is the sense of Adorno's reference to the dying of elderly people who, in their decline, may cease to have any remnant of their individuality long before their biological life ceases. Agamben too, refers to the modern experience of death, using examples such as the comatose person. This is a common problem for modern medical ethics: the point at which life ends. The ethical significance produced by this question does not lie in the delineation of a point between life and death, which has become more difficult the more advanced modern medical science becomes, it lies in the creation in an individual of a site of an

indifferentiation between life and death. Whereas the natural ending of a life can prefigure what happened in the camps, the significant difference is the production of such a state through mechanisms of power and technology. Agamben expresses this through the idea of survival.

Referring to Foucault's concept of the growth of biopower through the transformation of notions of sovereignty, Agamben argues that Auschwitz instantiates a new form of biopower. He cites Foucault as arguing that the "old" sovereign power constituted itself on the basis of the dictum "to make die and to let live", premised upon notions of the right to terminate life through capital punishment. This dictum changes through the Enlightenment to the idea of "to make live and to let die", a form of biopower which is characterized by technologies focusing upon the production, discipline and reproduction of the human body, within paradigms of justice and science that focus on the maintenance of life rather than the use of death as an exercise of power and control. For Agamben, Auschwitz instantiates a third form of exercising power, a form that he characterizes as the "most specific trait of twentieth century biopolitics ... to make survive."[2]

Survival, in this sense, is a production, an effect of power rather than a resistance to power. Survival instantiates in the individual a form of life that is not living, and furthermore, a form of life that cannot testify to the extirpation of human life within it. The Muselmann is the figure that reveals the nature of the camps, but it is precisely the figure that cannot bear witness, because he or she is beyond the point of bearing witness, beyond the point of any construction of

meaning or even attempt to give meaning to experience. Agamben ironically confirms this thesis at the end of his book with a series of quotations from camp survivors based around the theme "I was a Muselmann."[3] It appears as an odd end to a book that has been arguing that there is no possibility of bearing witness to this experience of death in life, however the testimonies cited support his argument, because there is always a route out for these people, a situation beyond the state of the Muselmann. By the very fact of their survival this had to be so, otherwise extermination would follow. The testimonies revolve around the moment when they ceased to be a Muselmann, rather than accounts of the experience itself, confirming the impossibility of rendering such an experience, of bearing witness.

For Agamben, the production, based around the trope "to make survive", is the point at which:

> " ... biopower sought to produce its final secret: a kind of absolute biopolitical substance that, in its isolation, allows for the attribution of demographic, ethnic, national and political identity."[4]

Adorno writes about life as being infiltrated in its very basic forms in similar ways in Minima Moralia:

> "What the philosophers once knew as life has become the sphere of private existence and now of mere consumption, dragged along as an appendage of the

process of material production, without autonomy or substance of its own."[5]

Agamben's use of the Muselmann is indebted to Primo Levi's description of this figure in the camps. For Levi, though, the Musselmänner are precisely not figures of survival, but the people who lose their identity and their possibility for surviving very soon after entering the camp. Those who survive do so through collaboration, luck, or are marked out by a particular attribute or skill that is useful to the camp authorities. The Muselmänner are only in the camp "on a visit", and will soon be exterminated, as they are useless to the camp authorities.[6] Agamben`s selection of the Muselmann, and his reading of camp life through this figure, allows him to have at his theoretical disposal, just this isolated "biopolitical substance", but he ignores the gradations of camp experience and survival that occur in Levi's accounts. There is no "grey zone" in Agamben's account because there is only a unitary power which instantiates itself within a certain form of individuality reduced to "bare life", a biopolitical substance. This is a characteristic mode of argumentation that Agamben uses, and everything rests on this use of particular examples, and what is revealed through those examples. However, there has to be a question as to why to just pick those particular examples as revelatory. For Agamben, the real reason for his selection of the Muselmann is his philosophical emphasis on the exception. No other form of survival in the camps represents the exception, the limit figure as well as the Muselmann. Agamben describes the exception in the following way:

"The exception is what cannot be included in the whole of which it is a member and cannot be a member of the whole in which it is always already included. What emerges in this limit figure is the radical crisis of every possibility of clearly distinguishing between membership and inclusion, between what is outside and what is inside, between exception and rule."[7]

This philosophical commitment to the exemplary exception determines the emphasis on the Muselmann as it is this figure that reveals the biopolitical basis of modern politics and life, in fact, the indistinction between modern politics and life. The camp as the site of the production of this form of life is "the bio-political paradigm of the West."[8]

Agamben's claim is that the camp is the first time the space of a new political production and interaction between power, life and politics becomes instantiated. This occurs initially in a space of a suspension of the law, but becomes encrypted within the bodies of humans in a way that cannot be resolved through a return to a form of law once the suspension of law has passed. What is revealed through the camps, through the figure of the Muselmann, is an indistinction between life and death, which will continually reappear as a new form of political power after this moment. Agamben's examples concern medical technology, what he has termed "bio-political tattooing", and one thinks of Camp X-ray, and other such zones of indistinction.[9]

For Agamben, what is at stake in the camp is the isolation and production of a form of pure being, a "bare life", which can then be dealt with at will by

"sovereign power". It is important to note that bare life is a produced form of life not a reduction to some core essence. The importance of the paradigm of the camps for Agamben is that, in the figure of the Muselmann, a form of life is produced as bare life, as just a subject for the play of power. Agamben can be criticised for his reliance on Schmittian notions of sovereign power and decisionist political thinking. This is exactly the critique that Andrew Norris makes of his work in stating that his decisions on the exemplarity of something as an exception have an element of arbitrary sovereign power to them:

> " ... the claim that something is exemplary is as much a product of a Schmitt-style decision as is the claim that something is an exception."[10]

Norris's critique consists in his argument that Agamben relies on Schmittian concepts of decision making to isolate exemplary examples of modern political life. Norris argues that Agamben's mistake is to:

> " ... say that the aptness or accuracy of a description is something that is appropriately determined only by a sovereign decision."[11]

Norris argues that the acceptance of Schmittian decisionism makes it logically impossible for Agamben to make the generalised claims of exemplarity that he does for figures such as the Muselmann, and that it involves Agamben in a form of deciding between the victims of the camps one more time.

The problem with this critique is the way it frames Agamben's relation to Schmitt. For Norris, Agamben falls into a trap that Schmitt identified as making a "decision against the decision".[12] This is the trap of the anarchist theorist (in this case Bakunin). However, Agamben, in his writing on the state of emergency describes a political development, within which the state of emergency can no longer be considered as it is theorised by Schmitt. For Schmitt, the state of emergency is elaborated as a thesis that could incorporate that moment of violence external to the law, within the space of legality, and it is so included, through the sovereign decision. Agamben identifies Schmitt's writing as a response to the Benjaminian notion of "pure" or "divine" violence.[13] The state of emergency was given the task by Schmitt of responding to the Benjaminian challenge of a pure form of violence, a violence that is not related to the law. Agamben argues that Schmitt fails in his attempt to use the state of emergency and the sovereign decision as a means of relating this pure violence to the law. Schmitt's strategy fails because there is no separation between exception and norm, or to be accurate, because the spatial and temporal separation of exception and norm has fallen away. The Western political system was distinguished through this dialectical antithesis between law and pure violence, which could be related through the differentiation of exception and norm, but the process of modern biopower which begins in the camps is the indifferentiation of exception and norm. The Muselmann is the site of this indifferentiation. According to Agamben, this is the political state that we are living in, a state of emergency which has no relation to law, and no relation to the norm, but that founds itself on the decision on life

made through sovereign power. Agamben is not making a decision on the exemplarity of the Muselmann, but describing the Muselmann as the site of this new form of sovereign power, the result of a transformation in the political system. The system transforms itself into an apparatus of death because the sovereign decision, the fundamental founding political decision, is the decision on life, on the power to make live or let die, or the creation of new forms of death in life. Agamben's political ontology is reliant on a Schmittian concept of sovereign power as the founding decision of a sovereign in the state of exception, but his response to this is not a decision against decision, but to try and find a new politics within this zone of indetermination:

> "I would not feel up to forgoing this indistinction of public and private, of biological body and body politic, of zoë and bios, for any reason whatsoever. It is here that I must find my space once again – here or nowhere else. Only a politics that starts from such an awareness can interest me." [14]

Agamben attempts to resolve the aporia by a transcendental turn in his thinking, whereby the Muselmann's extreme situation becomes a representation of the impossibility and possibility of a distinction between the human and the non-human within any form of individuality. There is a possibility of survival for the human being when all aspects of humanity have been extirpated in life, because humans *per se* exist in the fracture between the human and the inhuman that is the grounding of the point of language acquisition. For Agamben, the

transcendental condition of the possibility of being human is grounded in a moment of indifferentiation between the human and the inhuman in the process of language acquisition; at the heart of humanity, there is the very basis of the situation encapsulated by the Muselmann, this indifferentiation of human and inhuman, this impossibility of the attribution of meaning, but, still, this possibility of humanity, of a remnant of survival.

This is a characteristic move for Agamben. In the book Infancy and History – The Destruction of Experience, he points towards a limit of experience, which cannot be understood as the limit of death, but has to be thought through the origins of language, through the idea of an infancy of experience, a point of transcendental origin for all experience which occurs at the moment prior to concrete language acquisition:

> "It is infancy, it is the transcendental experience of the difference between language and speech, which first opens the space of history ... to experience necessarily means to re-accede to infancy as history's transcendental place of origin."[15]

The transcendental place of origin becomes the focal point and culmination of Agamben's thinking. In the essay on "Infancy and History", this transcendental point of origin has a Heideggerian significance of the placing of the individual within the space of history, and in the reflections on Auschwitz, this point of origin is more Derridean, in its marking of a transcendental space of both the

possibility and the impossibility of the point of difference between the human and the inhuman. In both these writings, Agamben makes the final move of arguing that a return to this space is the form of life that can access some form of experience in a damaged modernity. In the essay on experience, the culmination is the idea of an infancy of experience as the only point at which any authentic experience can take place. In the reflections on Auschwitz, the idea of the survival of a remnant becomes a form of return to this point of indifferentiation between the human and the inhuman:

> "Muselmann and witness, the inhuman and the human are coextensive, and, at the same time, non-coincident ... the non-human is the one who can survive the human being and the human being is the one who can survive the non-human. Only because a Muselmann could be isolated in a human being, only because human life is essentially destructible and divisible can the witness survive the Muselmann ... What can be infinitely destroyed is what can infinitely survive."[16]

Survival in the sense of a survival of humanity, rather than the "make survive of biopower", rests upon a transcendental condition of the possibility and impossibility of humanity as such. Agamben appears to be arguing that we cannot bear witness to the human itself, rather than the Muselmann in particular, because the transcendental condition of the human resolves itself into just that fracture, that space of indifferentiation between the human and the inhuman, between life and speech.

J.M. Bernstein has identified this transcendental turn of Agamben's thinking as the point at which Adorno and Agamben differ:

> " ... Agamben wants the inhuman itself to be the fund or fount of ethical response. But if the experience of the inhuman is not the experience of the loss of the human, its eclipse, how might the experience of the inhuman cause abhorrence ? For Adorno, there is something anamnestic in our response, a response at the loss and absence of aura, hence a response to the claim of aura in *its* precise lapsing and consequent absence ... There is no *intrinsic* designation of the inhuman (it is not a self-sufficient dimension or stratum); and it is just such an intrinsic designation that I hear in Agamben's treatment."[17]

This is an interesting argument as it points to a difference between Adorno and Agamben in terms of a humanism. Adorno's thinking would somehow involve an intrinsic designation of the human, whereas Agamben's would revolve around the inhuman. However, for Agamben, it is not the inhuman that is the fount of ethical response, or of a placing in history of the individual, but the point of indifferentiation between human and inhuman, the point of both the impossibility and possibility of being human. The problem for Agamben's argument is a shift between a concept of bare life as a production and effect of power and a concept of bare life as a form of life which can resist power. The closeness of these two elements rests on the concepts of indifferentiation and relation. Bare life as an

effect of sovereign power is an indifferentiation, because it is a relation of the same, what bare life relates to is only itself as a product of the exercise of sovereign power, in an empty way, that becomes almost analogous to the sovereign decision itself in the state of exception. What occurs with this indifferentiation is a number of spaces in modern political life that are effectively empty in terms of the grounds and the relation, for either decisions or for life itself. Bare life is in this sense not grounded on the human or the inhuman but on an indifferentiation configured as the relation of the same. The form of life that Agamben wants to relate to an infancy or elsewhere, as we will see to a potentiality, is a bare life which as potentiality does not relate, or holds itself in a suspended relation. The question is what is the significant difference here between an indifferentiation and a non-relation ? Is it a conscious appropriation of a space of indetermination, rather than just the occupation of such a space through the effects of power ? In Homo Sacer, Agamben describes the sovereign decision as a form of power , which holds itself as a "being in force without significance".[18] This is a pure relation which includes bare life through its exclusion, a form of relating to a bare life that in its relating excludes bare life from such a relation. The question for Agamben in the move from a delineation of bare life as produced in such a relation, and a form of life in which a bare life cannot be isolated, is how the structure of relationality changes significantly. Both descriptions of life seem indeterminate and empty. One of the problems for Agamben is this account of power in terms of a decisional matrix, as sovereign power, which gives this false symmetry to the relation between a sovereign power and bare life.[19] We will consider these

questions later in relation to Agamben's underlying ontology of potentiality, but it is important to note at this stage that the confusion as to what bare life means is present in his reflections on Auschwitz.

Bare Life

The concept of bare life plays a central role in Agamben's book Homo Sacer – Sovereign Power and Bare Life. The book begins by drawing attention to the Ancient Greek distinction between bios and zoē, both words designating life. Bios refers to the form or mode of life particular to an individual or a group, which is specifically concerned with modes of living rather than the biological fact of life itself, and is therefore subject to ethical and political ascriptions. Zoē refers to the simple fact of living, the biological fact of existence.[20]

Agamben's text traces the mode in which life gets prepared for political ascriptions, particularly in the movement from Greek to Roman thought. The key concept is "bare life", which he equates with a form of existence legitimated by Roman law, the *homo sacer*- the human that can be killed but not sacrificed. There is a confusion in the text as to what "bare life" actually denotes.[21] Bare life is mainly seen as the equivalent of *homo sacer* which is the preparation of a particular form of life to enter into the realm of politics through a sovereign decision which designates a citizen as liable for death but not for sacrifice. The particular figure of the *homo sacer* within Roman law is a paradoxical figure, in that he is both within and beyond the law. He is within the law in that there is a

claim that he can be legally executed but beyond the law in the sense that there can be no sacrificial sanction given to such an execution. The decision of sovereignty is one that is an exclusive inclusion, it includes bare life within the political sphere whilst at the same time excluding it. This is what Agamben refers to as the "state of exception".[22] The state of exception absorbs bare life through pronouncing it as an excess, as something that escapes its juridical rule. This is the process of abandonment or of ban. Bare life can only be conceived in the political sphere through its excision from that sphere. The sovereign decision includes through a process of exclusion. This is a decision because there is no legal or formal grounding for the exercise of sovereignty. It is a formal, but empty decision, which founds an empty space. Thus, the symmetry within Agamben`s writing between the sovereign power and bare life. Both relate to each other in the form of an inclusive exclusion. But what is being excluded and included here ?

Agamben gives us a political ontology, which enables us to understand a certain zone of indistinction caused through the sovereign decision in the "state of exception", a political space that makes it difficult to distinguish between life and death. Through an analysis of a paradoxical figure within Roman law, he aims to uncover the central and predominant relation of sovereign power and bare life within the modern political space. This political space is increasingly determined by an extension and radicalisation of sovereign power within different realms of society, so Agamben gives concrete examples of this with such medical conditions as the "neomort" who hangs between definitions of brain-stem death and "natural" death, and goes on to map the space of the modern as one where this

indistinction and state of exception has become the rule, with the concentration camp as the paradigmatic space of modernity. There is no such thing as bare life in itself, but a form of life is produced as bare life , which is completely open to the exercise of power.

In his recent book, The Open, Agamben outlines what he terms the anthropological machine, and he gives an account of its two symmetrical forms. The anthropological machine of modernity functions through Darwinian discourse by attempting to isolate and classify that which is non-human or animal within the human, for example the location of the ape within man.[23] This process is taken further, in Agamben's opinion, through the later assignation of certain humans as similar to animals, for example in anti-semitism, where the Jew is designated as the inhuman to be found within the human, and referred to in terms of an animal. The symmetrical relation of the anthropological machine is the earlier one historically of the production of an animal dressed in human form, such as the feral man, the wild child, or figures such as the slave and barbarian. Agamben explains the symmetry of the anthropological machine in the following way:

> "If, in the machine of the moderns, the outside is produced through the exclusion of an inside and the inhuman produced by animalising the human, here (in the earlier, symmetrical version), the inside is obtained through the inclusion of an outside, and the non-man is produced by the humanisation of an animal."[24]

If we follow this schema, there is not a process whereby something termed "nature" is suppressed through the acquisition of rational thinking, but rather different negotiations of what it means to be human and animal, in the context of a decision made on life, and what life means. Life is produced through these symmetrical processes of inclusion and exclusion of human and animal within each other, but the production of this life is an "empty space":

> "... the truly human being who should occur there is only the place of a ceaselessly updated decision in which the caesurae and their rearticulation are always dislocated and displaced anew. What would thus be obtained, however is neither an animal life, nor a human life, but only a life that is excluded and separated from itself – only a *bare life*."[25]

The genealogical investigation into the concept of life reveals its lack of determination and definition. The human can only be understood in relation to life in the terms of a disjunction, rather than the traditional definition of the human as conjunction of rational soul and animal body. This disjunction is the result of a series of divisions of the concept of life, as vegetal, organic, animal and human. The distinction drawn on the border between human and animal becomes a ceaseless "metaphysico-political operation", which decides both the meaning of the human and the values that are attached to it.[26]

Borrowing from Benjamin's concept of "dialectics at a standstill", Agamben's concept of bare life articulates the experience of a life which is captured and

divided within an anthropological machine at a standstill. This is a life that cannot be defined in the terms of a dialectical interplay between humanity and animality or as a synthesis of the two parts, but as a between, as an "interval".[27] The anthropological machine, which continually reproduces itself through history in a ceaseless division and decision on life, has broken down, reached a point where it can operate no longer, and what is articulated in this breakdown, is the empty space of a bare life that is neither human nor animal:

> "The machine is, so to speak, stopped: it is 'at a standstill', and, in the reciprocal suspension of the two terms, something for which we perhaps have no name and which is neither animal nor man settles in between nature and humanity and holds itself in the mastered relation ..."[28]

For Agamben, the core sociopolitical concern of modernity has been the value or non-value of life. He identifies the beginnings of this biopower in the early Nazi texts around the euthanasia of those with learning difficulties and mental illness, of the judgement of a life not worthy of being lived. With the increasing biotechnical capacities to genetically transform and mutate human biology, power has become more and more focused upon the life of the human as a site for the play of its resources:

> "Today a law that seeks to transform itself wholly into life is more and more confronted with a life that has been deadened and mortified into juridical rule.

> Every attempt to rethink the political space of the West must begin with the clear awareness that we no longer know anything of the classical distinction between zoē and bios."[29]

What Adorno diagnosed in the mid to late 1940s has been even further entrenched, according to Agamben, through the biopolitical focus of modern political power on the production and reproduction of forms of life, within which there can no longer be any distinction between a biological organism and a life that has its experience in relation to a separateness from a need for self-preservation:

> "The 'body' is always already a biopolitical body and bare life, and nothing in it or the economy of its pleasure seems to allow us to find solid ground on which to oppose the demands of sovereign power."[30]

Agamben's resistance to any fundamental ground of bare life appears to leave him in a position of conducting an investigation into the processes whereby life is prepared for political ascriptions and increasingly in modernity colonised by political ascriptions. This appears to be a similar project to the one that Michel Foucault undertook in the first volume of The History of Sexuality. Agamben acknowledges this debt throughout his book, but criticises Foucault's allusion to a "different economy of bodies and pleasures" at the end of the History of Sexuality.[31] He urges more caution, although I think he misreads Foucault as

alluding to some fundamental alternative to current forms of biopower, when all that is being claimed in the History of Sexuality is that a different biopolitical structure will arise in the future, a different "economy of bodies and pleasures", from which a survey could be made of the current obsession with sex and sexuality. This is not to say that this new economy is more in accordance with truth or the reality of human desires, just that it gives a new insight into current dilemnas.[32]

Although there is a lack of clarity about what bare life means for Agamben, I think it is a deliberate lack of clarity in the sense that bare life itself is indeterminate and indefinable. With his concept of bare life, Agamben is not attempting a naturalistic definition of a core of human existence that could serve as the basis for ethical thought. This is the reading that Judith Butler gives in her transcription of "bare life" into "precarious life".[33] Butler reads a concept of "precarious" life as a vulnerable and fragile core existence, which can be the grounds for an ethics and a politics. She grounds this concept of "precarious" life through the work of Levinas, and the idea that the initial ethical relation to the other is a relation in which the other can either be respected as other, or dominated and killed. The precariousness of life becomes either an ontological presupposition, or a naturalistic ethics. Agamben's concept of bare life is neither of these things, but the tracing of a political figure as a form of life produced through the relation of sovereign power and bare life. The political ontology is the argument that the fundamental paradigm of politics occurs through the encounter of a sovereign decision which separates a form of life as naked or bare

life which then can be manipulated at will. The problem for bare life then is its separation from any form of life, any social role. In its separation from form of life, bare life becomes an isolated, yet empty definition , which can be dominated by sovereign power. The biological concept of life is the form in late modernity in which bare life gets separated from any form of life as a means for the manipulations of sovereign power. Agamben refers to Rabinow's distinction between two attitudes towards life; that of the scientist who sees his life as a laboratory, the example given being the scientist who is fatally ill and experiments upon himself, and the person who opposes any link between experimentation and life.[34] For Agamben, these are not fundamentally opposing conceptions of life, as they both rely on a certain concept of biological life which has its roots in the sovereign decision on the body of the *homo sacer*. It is the distinctive paradigm of late modernity that the *homo sacer* is now to be found in concepts of biological life. The dominant form of life is a bare life defined as biological life. Thus, rather than bare life being an essentialist foundation for any resistance to sovereign power, it is precisely the elaboration of bare life as form of life that is the most problematic element of current politics. This is why the paradigm of the concentration camp is the paradigm for modern political life, in the sense that the forms of life produced there as bare life in the extreme, in the forms of the Muselmänner, are the paradigms of the modern elaboration of a concept of life.

There can be no elevation of this bare life as the bearer of a fundamental sovereignty itself. This is the mistake of Bataille's philosophy for Agamben.[35] The

abjection of a bare life cannot serve as a form of resistance to sovereign power. Agamben's political ontology disavows any form of naturalism or essentialism:

> "There are not *first* life as a natural biological given and anomie as a state of nature, and *then* their implication in law through the state of exception. On the contrary, the very possibility of distinguishing life and law, anomie and *nomos*, coincides with their articulation in the biopolitical machine. Bare life is a product of the machine and not something that preexists it ..."[36]

The political ontology concerns a genealogy of a form of power that occurs through the sovereign decision in the state of exception and a form of life as bare life which have increasingly come to the fore and coincided in late modernity. The problem with this political ontology is its undifferentiated notion of power purely as sovereign power. Agamben's political ontology, although read through a complex genealogy of Roman Imperial power, Auschwitz and modern political structures and forms outlines one aspect of political power as the only aspect of power and thus raises the stakes for any resistance to that power. The paradigm of power in terms of sovereignty, and particularly in terms of a sovereign decision as the founding act of power, leaves any sense of a diffused or networked account of power unacknowledged. Furthermore, Agamben does not articulate any sense of power as resistance, as we will see later. His political ontology is avowedly Benjaminian in the sense that everything is staked on the eighth thesis on the philosophy of history. There, Benjamin states that:

" ... the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of exception' in which we live is the rule. We must attain to a concept of history that accords with this fact. Then we will clearly see that it is our task to bring about the real state of exception, and this will improve our position in the struggle against fascism."[37]

Benjamin's statement is in the context of the struggle against fascism, but Agamben's account of political power doesn't allow for differentiations in political systems as the state of exception as the rule is read across a multiplicity of political forms. Therefore, he suffers from an analogous deficit in specificity in political analysis to Adorno, whose account of domination often flattens out into an undifferentiated concept of political history. Agamben's political ontology is even worse in the sense that its paradigm is the sovereign decision on the state of exception, which gives little account of who the sovereign is and the forms the decision takes. In his recent book on the State of Exception there is a discussion of the different juridical forms in which the state of emergency, or exception appears, but it is precisely this account of politics as a purely juridical form that encapsulates a lack of differentiation to this political theory. Judith Butler tries to incorporate an element of different forms of political authority in terms of her Foucaultien adaptation of sovereignty as the return of an anachronistic form of power within a decaying governmentality of late modernity:

" ... sovereignty, under emergency conditions in which the rule of law is suspended, would re-emerge in the context of governmentality with the vengeance of an anachronism that refuses to die."[38]

Despite the flaws in Agamben's political ontology, in terms of the concept of the sovereign decision and the state of exception, the account of bare life does give a genealogy of a problematic concept within Western philosophy, through its incorporation in political forms, particularly in terms of its appearance as biological life in late modernity. Agamben does give multiple and particular accounts of this bare life, some of which we have outlined earlier. The importance of such a concept is that it gives content to the account of what it means for there to be a "life that does not live". If we sever the account in Agamben's text of the pure symmetry between sovereign power and bare life, and, instead try to understand this concept of bare life as a distinctive form of life produced in the modern biopolitical space, then Agamben's political ontology has a power as an interpretive tool. In an article entitled, "Thoughts on the concept of biopower today", Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose criticise Agamben's attempt to think the relation of bare life as the life of the Muselmann in the camps to all other forms in which life comes into an encounter with power as a trivialisation of Auschwitz. They argue that Auschwitz is not in any way exemplary of modern biopolitics.[39] However, in the series of relations between forms of power and life that they elucidate, a series that includes the decoupling of reproduction and sexuality, the genetic coding of racial characteristics, the pre-symptomatic diagnosis of long-term

illnesses, and the genetic coding of mental illnesses, it is precisely though a thinking of these forms of biopower as the production of bare lives that a linkage with the camp can be made, in terms of a "thanato-politics". If we take the pre-symptomatic diagnoses of genetic predispositions to develop certain illnesses such as Alzheimer's Disease as an example, what is precisely produced in the individual is a zone of emptiness and uncertainty, because the developmental progression of the predisposition is unknown. What is being produced is a form of illness within life that doesn't exist in the present and may not exist in the future, but which manifests itself as an empty space within the individual that has all sorts of political and social ramifications. The point of trying to think this space in terms of a continuity with Auschwitz is an attempt to think Adorno's categorical imperative surrounding life after Auschwitz, that we must act in a way that something like Auschwitz could never occur again.[40] The thinking of the continuity between the forms of death-in-life produced in the camps, and forms of life being produced as empty spaces in modern biopolitics, is not a simple continuity, but a structural similarity in terms of a particular operation of power on life. Agamben's concept of bare life gives us a key to thinking the relation between the interruptive catastrophic event of Auschwitz and its after effects within modern society. Rose and Rabinow's dismissal of the link is also the dismissal of the thinking of a relation between Auschwitz and life and forms of power after Auschwitz. The justice in their critique lies in the over extensive concept of a state of exception and the sovereign decision within Agamben's work, but the concept of bare life, severed from this undefined concept of power can give a key

to understanding certain spaces within modern social life as produced spaces of an empty form of bare life. This is not to say that these forms of bare life are immediately and necessarily dominated or killed. These forms of life may be improved, in terms of such notions as "quality of life", but there is no analysis by Rose and Rabinow of the ideological nature of such a concept of quality of life.[41] Agamben`s concept of bare life can be thought in relation to the idea of a "life that does not live". It is in the attempt to then revivify such a life or find some ground for its recuperation that the difference between Adorno and Agamben's work will be located.

The relation of this experience of bare life to an experience of a fundamental ontology of potentiality, an experience that Agamben will relate to the Benjaminian concept of the "real state of exception" determines the terrain of a philosophical encounter between Agamben and Adorno as to the experience of bare life, as something that is both produced through a certain political apparatus, however conceived, and that can serve as a form of opposition or resistance to such a designation. The concepts of bare life in Agamben's work and of damaged life within Adorno's work have a similarity in their emphasis on an empty form of life which in its function as a pure receptacle of the manipulations of power leaves few options for resistance. In an analogous way to Adorno, Agamben refers to a certain intellectual experience that can in its receptivity, freedom and potentiality be given over to a form of life, that will not allow anything like a bare or naked life to be separated. This thought is characterised as an "experience, an *experimentum* that has as its object the potential character of life and of

human intelligence".[42] This fundamental experience of thinking, will serve as an experience that can move beyond the attempt to separate a bare life from every form of life, as Agamben argues:

> "Only if I am not always already and solely enacted, but rather delivered to a possibility and a power, only if living and intending and apprehending themselves are at stake each time in what I live and intend and apprehend - only, if, in other words, there is thought - only then can a form of life become, in its own factness and thingness, *form-of-life,* in which it is never possible to isolate something like naked life".[43]

It is this terrain of a fundamental experience of life that can escape the reifications of capitalism and identity thinking that Adorno and Agamben share, but it is also the terrain of a fundamental disagreement over the role of philosophy and thought, which Agamben will tie to a certain Heideggerean reading of potentiality, and Adorno will attempt to read in terms of a post-Hegelian dialectics.

Agamben concludes Homo Sacer in the following way:

> "This biopolitical body that is bare life must itself be transformed into the site for the constitution and installation of a form of life that is wholly exhausted in bare life and a bios that is only its own zoē."[44]

He poses a puzzling question as to how can a bios, a way of life, be its own zoē, how can a mode of existence seize hold of the bare life that escapes it ? This, for Agamben, is the terrain of the meeting point of metaphysics and politics, as he terms it thus:

> " ... how can a form of life (i.e. bios) seize hold of the very haplōs that constitutes both the task and the enigma of Western metaphysics."[45]

Agamben then terms "bare life" as a correspondence to the Greek haplōs, which he defines as the philosophy of pure Being. It is this ontological turn that Adorno attempts to resist through his idea of natural history. Adorno will attempt to differentiate his concept of experience through a dialectical reading of nature and history, and the concept of damaged life to which we now turn.

Chapter 3: The Idea of Natural History

What does Adorno mean by his use of the concept of life ? Simon Jarvis has pointed out the difficulties inherent in Adorno's thinking about a concept of life:

> " The difficulties incident to any attempt to articulate the bare idea of 'life without domination', let alone, 'life without self-preservation' are obvious ... Adorno's materialism is deeply aporetic."[1]

Jarvis is clearly correct in his comment, but that does not mean that a reflection on Adorno's use of a concept of life, however deliberately diffuse and gestural it may be, cannot serve as an important figure through which we can interrogate his concept of experience. In this chapter I will analyse the question of a philosophical definition of life in Adorno's work. My aim is to elucidate the paradoxical statement that "life does not live", and to outline some of the routes beyond this paradox that might outline new forms of experience.

Philosophical Antecedents

Before engaging with the central problem of the concept of life in Adorno's work, it will be useful to outline the history of Lebensphilosophie in terms of its relevance for his writing. Life philosophy has been associated with a group of

philosophers from the end of the nineteenth century, particularly Nietzsche, Dilthey and Bergson.[2] However, the broad concerns of life philosophy were passed down from the Romanticism of the eighteenth century, from thinkers such as Herder, Novalis, Schiller and Schelling. The connections between Critical Theory and German Romanticism have already been exhaustively mapped by writers such as Andrew Bowie amongst others.[3] For our purposes, it is important to lay out the connections between a philosophy of life and concepts of experience in their movement from late nineteenth century thought into early twentieth century phenomenology and psychoanalysis, which provided the philosophical milieu for Adorno's early thought.

Philosophies of life broadly shared a concern with a delineation of (often configured as a return to) the full experiential richness of life in opposition to technological, schematised modes of human thought. This occasionally accompanied forms of vitalism that verged on mystic irrational thought about the foundational psychic energy of life, but also emphasised a concrete thinking in terms of starting from human experience itself. There was a fundamental division in terms of whether the life that was being considered was human life or life in itself. For example, Bergson and in a different way Nietzsche, were particularly concerned with life, and the forces of life itself, in how they structured human existence and produced new forms of existence regardless of human agency. Dilthey was more concerned with the interpretation of human forms of experience through the construction of a philosophy of interpretation which did not suppress the living material at hand but philosophised from experience itself. What these writers

shared was a critique of experience in modernity and a concern with a thinking about life as something that has been suppressed by modern forms of thought and modes of understanding. However, this return to life was not conceived in essentialist terms, but for Nietzsche, Bergson and later Freud, in terms of a primary dynamism which was productive in itself and adapted and changed in accordance with history. For Dilthey, a philosophy of life meant a return to history and a dispensing with absolute knowledge for a temporal understanding of human experience. He conceived of this as a new beginning for philosophy:

> "The fundamental idea of my philosophy is that no one, so far, has based his philosophising on the full, unmutilated whole of experience, and so on the whole fullness of reality. Speculation is certainly abstract ... but empiricism is no less so. It bases itself on mutilated experience, distorted from the outset by an atomistic theoretical view of mental life ... no complete human being can be confined within this experience."[4]

The connection with some of Adorno's thinking is clear although his specific project in Minima Moralia is concerned with just such an interrogation of mutilated experience in itself as the only form of experience that is available for philosophical reflection. There is no possibility of a return to unmutilated experience, only the damaged life of modernity.

Dilthey is important for his linking of a philosophy of life with a philosophy of experience. For Dilthey, this relation is explicit through his use of the word

Erlebnis, which as a singular noun was hardly known in German before his work, although Goethe used the term Erlebnisse.[5] The prefix Er-, added to lebnis, deepens the sense of life involved. For Dilthey an experience described in terms of Erlebnis is something primary and prior to any division of subject and object, and serves as both a synthesis of past and present and a reaching out to the future. It is something that is intrinsically a temporal experience and can only be understood through historical thought. It is interesting that Adorno and Benjamin use the term Erfahrung rather than Erlebnis, and Benjamin has a specific distinction between Erlebnis and Erfahrung in his account of modernity. This is an issue that I will return to in more detail in a later chapter. Diltheyan experience is not something that Adorno will want to appropriate, as it is more akin to the experience that Heidegger develops in Being and Time, in its reliance on a temporalising projection, and a unity prior to any subject-object differentiation. However, the linkage between a philosophy of life and a philosophy of experience does become important in Minima Moralia. In his early philosophical works, Adorno outlines a concept of philosophical interpretation that is opposed to that of Dilthey and the hermeneutics that grew from Dilthey's work, in that philosophical interpretation, for Adorno, is not concerned with the recuperation of an intentional meaning, but the revelation of the historical and political bases of philosophical problems, so that a dialectic of nature and history can reveal, through a constellation of different sources and contents, both a temporal truth and the dissolution of any fundamental or absolute basis for that truth. In "The Actuality of Philosophy", Adorno writes of interpretation in the following way:

" ... the idea of philosophical interpretation does not shy away from the liquidation of philosophy, which appears to me to be signalled by the collapse of the last philosophical claims to totality. For the strict exclusion of all ontological questions in the received sense, the avoidance of invariable universal concepts - including, for example, that of man - the exclusion of every idea of a self-sufficient totality of mind, including of a self-enclosed "*Geistesgeschichte*"; the concentration of philosophical questions on concrete historically immanent complexes from which they should not be separated: these postulates become very similar to a dissolution of what has up to now been called philosophy."[6]

Adorno here lines up with what Hannah Arendt has termed the "rebellion of the philosophers against philosophy" which she uses to ascribe to the triumvirate of life philosophers Nietzsche, Bergson and Marx, in The Human Condition.[7] What is interesting in the return of concepts of life and experience in Minima Moralia is that in a sense they act as figures for a return of metaphysics, albeit in an aporetic sense. Contrary to received opinion, Adorno's later work can be read as more "optimistic" than his earlier works, in that through a concept of experience, it attempts to recuperate an idea of philosophy which the earlier concept of interpretation dissolves. Obviously, this can only be read optimistically, if a recuperation of philosophy was thought to be a good thing.

This introduction has served to show the associations of a philosophy of life which would have been uppermost in Adorno`s mind when he writes that:

" What the philosophers once knew as life has become the sphere of private existence and now of mere consumption, dragged along as an appendage of the process of material production, without autonomy or substance of its own".[8]

The life philosophy delineated in this introduction deeply influenced both the development of Husserlian phenomenology and Freudian psychoanalysis, which formed the subject of Adorno's original Habilitation thesis on "The Concept of the Unconscious in the Transcendental Doctrine of the Soul", and his earlier doctoral dissertation on Husserl. As Bowie has pointed out, these early works outline a fundamental problem for Adorno of attempting to chart a course between a fidelity to forms of thought which undermine foundationalist and absolute forms of philosophising, whilst eschewing what he would consider the irrationalist components of vitalism.[9] The imperative to distance himself from the irrational components of life philosophy would be more urgent in the writing of Minima Moralia in the late 1940`s after the consequences of a bastardisation of a certain form of life philosophy (Nietzsche), along with concepts of race and Social Darwinism had led to key elements of National Socialism.

What becomes clear in Minima Moralia is that the project of a dissolution of philosophy has in some sense been carried out politically, but in the name of barbarism, and the ethical orientation of Adorno's later philosophy, and the references to Aristotelian notions of "the good life", serve as a forerunner of his project of the rescue of metaphysics which now runs alongside its critique.

Life and Self-preservation

Adorno's philosophical anthropology conducted through his account of the dialectic of enlightenment serves as the underpinning for his use of the concept of "life". This philosophical anthropology relates to the formation of subjectivity, which is outlined in the Odysseus chapter of Dialectic of Enlightenment . An account is given of the formation of the self through the "abrogation of sacrifice". Sacrificial rites contain within themselves the deceit of natural forces, which will lead to the outright domination of the self over nature. In sacrifice, the gods are ostensibly propitiated with the sacrificial offering, but the very act of attempting either to gain a favourable outcome or to defer an unfavourable outcome contains within itself a change in attitude toward the gods and the natural world, an attempt to alter the course of events through human agency. This agency is of course not fully developed in the sense that it acts against a background of weakness and fear of the supernatural. The self arises through an increase in the powers of human agency and a domination of rather than subjugation to nature. However, the self that arises, in denying and dominating nature, denies and dominates its own involvement in the natural world. The triumph over myth, instigates another myth in the form of the persistent, rigidified self:

> "The identically persistent self, which arises in the abrogation of sacrifice immediately becomes an unyielding, rigidified sacrificial ritual that man

celebrates upon himself by opposing his consciousness to the natural context."[10]

The grounding of the self arises through the domination of nature in order to preserve the life of the human animal, but in the process of the domination of nature the human disavows its connections with the natural world and therefore sacrifices itself to save itself.

The pre-history of subjectivity lies in a denial of nature in humanity and releases a dominating irrationality, which controls both outward and inward nature. This is a nucleus for Adorno of all civilizing rationality, and therefore, at the very heart of all history lies this domination. What exactly this domination is, is perplexing. What is the inner and the outer nature that is being dominated, and what is the relationship between the inner and outer prior to the formation of the self ? How does the self experience itself as dominating, and what is being dominated ? Are we discussing a form of instinctual repression, a denial of "polymorphous perversity" in favour of the rigid ego, as Marcuse outlines in Eros and Civilisation ?[11] All of these suggestions are inimical to Adorno, as he opposes arguments on the basis of a fundamental ontology of existence, or a 'state of nature' argument, and this is perhaps why the references to nature become increasingly sparse in the later work, as the language of objectivity and non-identity replaces the ideas of nature and life. The exception to this rule is Aesthetic Theory, in which concepts of nature and natural beauty are central, and where Adorno attempts his most complete description of the dimensions of a fulfilled experience. Such a description of a fulfilled experience can occur only

through aesthetic experience, because aesthetics deals with semblance rather than the reality of experience, and therefore can image a reconciliation that cannot be affirmed in reality.

To investigate further the responses to the above questions, it is necessary to interrogate Adorno's usage of both Freudian and Nietzschean themes in his writings, and also his critiques of Freud and Nietzsche. Adorno is indebted to Nietzsche for this conception of human life where all classifications and processes are due to serving the needs and drives to dominate and master the external world, and it has been regularly noted that Adorno's philosophical anthropology is fundamentally reliant on Nietzschean notions of power and domination. Bauer further identifies the commonalities in the conceptions of truth that Adorno and Nietzsche undermine, in that both are opposed to correspondence theories of truth and privilege understandings of truth as "experiment and adventure".[12] However, despite these evident commonalities, when exploring concepts of life, Adorno and Nietzsche appear to diverge quite sharply, even where Adorno might superficially be appearing to be outlining a Nietzschean theme. This is particularly the case when we examine the issue of self-preservation. For Adorno, as we have seen the process of self-preservation, through its reliance on the dominance and mastery of external nature and in its objectifying classifications of externality, separates the human from the natural in such a way that the life that is to be preserved is no longer evident. For Adorno, life occurs through the interrelationship of humanity and the world, through the embodiment of humans in nature, but the process of self-preservation forces a scission between humans and the natural world, and

between humans and their embodiment. Adorno outlines this in the following manner:

> "Man's domination over himself, which grounds his selfhood, is almost always the destruction of the subject in whose service it is undertaken: for the substance which is dominated, suppressed and dissolved by virtue of self-preservation is none other than that very life as functions of which the achievements of self-preservation find their sole definition and determination: it is, in fact, what is to be preserved."[13]

Some of these themes are admittedly Nietzschean, but Nietzsche would want to differentiate a concept of life that is fundamentally other to any definition of the human and is even not dependent on human self-preservation. Whilst Nietzsche occasionally writes as though our processes of knowledge are subordinate to the demands of self-preservation, he fundamentally argues that in its basic organic components there is more to life than self-preservation:

> "One cannot ascribe the most basic and primeval activities of protoplasm to a will to self-preservation, for it takes unto itself absurdly more than would be required to preserve it: and above all, it does not thereby 'preserve itself', it falls apart - The drive that rules here has to explain precisely this absence of desire for self-preservation. "[14]

For Nietzsche, human subjectivity is an epiphenomenon of the process of life, which is ruled fundamentally by a will to power that takes place in competing suprahuman drives and instincts: "life would be defined as an enduring form of processes of the establishment of force, in which the different contenders grow unequally".[15]

This movement beyond self-preservation belongs to the possibility of organic development and a fundamental battle between the strong and the weak. It is in this sense that Adorno and Nietzsche depart. Whereas both have an account of the formation of subjectivity as a renunciation of instinct and the body, for Adorno the important moment of an investigation of the pre-history of human subjective formation is an understanding of the human as more entwined with the natural as a process of mutuality, whereas Nietzsche's radicalism lies in his attempt to dispense with the human and the subject in terms of an aristocracy of what will forge powerful entities in life. Where Nietzsche and Adorno converge is in the understanding of a form of primal rupture in the formation of the human subject, and an account of the formation of culture which contains the seeds of its own decline in its very creation. The difference comes in the affirmative and negative stances that are taken towards this, as for Nietzsche, life is always something more than human, and this is to be welcomed, whereas for Adorno, human life is the fundamental concern. This dictates the critique of Nietzsche that Adorno conducts in Minima Moralia. For Adorno, Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics argues that hope gets mistaken for truth in the human construction of metaphysics. For Adorno, this is a fundamentally misplaced critique, because without a specific form

of hope, which is not just a wishful thinking, but which is "wrested from reality by negating it"[16], then no form of truth can be provided in the current climate of modernity. For Adorno, the recognition of the untruth of human existence does not mean that there is no hope for a way of living differently, and this form of blind acceptance, of Nietzschean *amor fati*, is more theological than the negative glimpses of truth as hope. For the Nietzschean, this hope is beside the point, because the impossibility of living in the sense given to that in human life is not the most important issue. Of more importance is the release of those energies within life that will further its development which, as we have seen, are not those of human self-preservation. Keith Ansell-Pearson argues as follows in his book Viroid Life ,"The task is to render the concepts of soul, life, value, and memory genealogical in Nietzsche's ... sense, not metaphysical ...".[17]

To understand what Adorno means by the life that is "annulled by self-preservation", it will be necessary to look elsewhere than his reception of Nietzsche, and, therefore we turn to the work of Freud.

Narcissism, Sublimation and the Ego

Psychoanalytic concepts informed Adorno's work and the project of the Frankfurt school throughout and particularly offered an understanding of how the processes of intensified reification embedded themselves within the human psyche. However, the critique of the usage of psychoanalysis by Frankfurt School thinkers, a critique which has been applied to Adorno, is that in their outline of a fundamental

repression of an "inner" nature, they disregard connections between inner and outer nature and reify an originary state of pre-subjectification and libidinal happiness. Bernstein characterises this separation between inner and outer as applied to mechanisms of repression in the following way:

> " The fundamental conceptual error of the simple instinctual renunciation story is that, despite itself, it assumes a fundamental separation between nature and culture, as if inner nature was a qualitatively and quantitatively given ..."[18]

This is what Whitebrook, in his book Perversion and Utopia, has referred to as "this Rousseauean figure of thought" that is searching for some untainted element within human nature that can then serve as an Archimedean point from which to effect radical or revolutionary transformation.[19] Adorno and Horkheimer do fall into these traps in Dialectic of Enlightenment, but Adorno has a more nuanced view of Freudian concepts which it will be useful to outline to give further content to the understanding of a concept of life.

Adorno appropriates from Freud the early distinction between ego-instincts and libidinal instincts, as Freud states "I have proposed that two groups of such primal instincts should be distinguished: the ego, or self-preservative instincts, and the sexual instincts".[20] This simple division would give content to Adorno's argument that self-preservation annuls all life in the dominating ego of subjectivity, with the placeholder for the concept of life in this schema being the idea of a free expression of the sexual instincts. This would give Adorno an account of the

formation of subjectivity as a renunciation, and a renunciation in favour of the self-preservation instincts at the price of any free expression of the sexual instincts. This would be the account that we have seen criticised above as the "simple instinctual renunciation story". This is certainly an account that Adorno appears to be offering in Dialectic of Enlightenment. Whitebrook argues that this reliance on the repression of an originary sexuality as the motor for civilisation and the refusal to construct any theory of sublimation which would allow for a more free attribution of the sexual instincts condemns Adorno and Horkheimer's understanding of human life to a form of bad utopianism:

> " ... it would follow from their argument that nothing short of remaining in or recapturing the original state and fulfilling 'the instinct for complete, universal and undivided happiness' could prevent the dialectic of enlightenment from unfolding. *This is the tacit omnipotent requirement that constitutes the psychoanalytically formulated bad utopianism on which the entire construction rests.*"[21]

In response to this problem, Whitebrook outlines the need for a theory of sublimation which could produce alternative forms of object attachment for the ego, which would not necessarily result in the catastrophic reading that Adorno gives. Whitebrook is sensitive to the historical situation that Adorno is writing from at the end of World War II, but argues that Adorno and Horkheimer nevertheless privilege first nature, and refuse to theorise how this nature could be

"sublimated-sublated".[22] Whereas many of these arguments are telling when applied to the fragmentary text that is Dialectic of Enlightenment, it ignores Adorno's more detailed appropriation and critique of Freud.

Adorno's Freud is a peculiar mixture of the early and the late work. Adorno does not show a great deal of interest in the Oedipal structure of humankind, arguing that Freud's timeless ahistorical understanding of the id, reifies and covers over the social components of unconscious processes which are unconscious precisely due to the process of modernity:

> "The time-lag between consciousness and the unconscious is itself the stigma of the contradictory development of society. Everything that got left behind is sedimented in the unconscious and has to foot the bill for progress and enlightenment. Its backwardness becomes Freud's timelessness".[23]

For Adorno, contrary to the critique of his work, it is the id that is rigid not the ego, and it is the failure of psychoanalysis to reflect on the social content of this abstractness which is its undoing due to its reversion to myth:

> " ... Freud's 'myths' ... recur wherever Freud too perpetrates ego-psychology, in his case an ego-psychology of the id, and treats the id as if it possessed the consummate rationality of the Viennese banker it at times really does resemble".[24]

Therefore, Adorno certainly does not articulate a first nature approach to an understanding of libidinal repression. Furthermore, when referring to the ego, he reads the ego in more complicated terms than just as a rigid, dominating form of subjectivity. Whitebrook argues that Adorno sees the ego as "rigidified, compulsory and coercive"[25], but it is far more unstable than that implies. Adorno's understanding of the ego relies on a reading of Freud's later essay on The Ego and the Id, alongside holding onto the earlier division between instincts for self-preservation and sexual instincts. Adorno does not refer to Freud's revision of his instinctual theory whereby the sexual instinct comes to include both self-preservative and libidinal impulses, whereas it is counterposed to the death instinct. Adorno seems singularly uninterested in the death instinct, which is peculiar given his later writings on death and survival. For him, the ego has to contend with both the sexual and the self-preservative instincts and is therefore far from stable. This is not a once and for all battle but an ongoing instability within the structure of the ego. Adorno's central critique of ego-psychology is its rigidifying gaze, which fixes the id and the ego as entities which are separated and which only interact through the mechanisms of drive and repression.

The concept of narcissism, for Adorno, "counts among Freud's most magnificent discoveries".[26] Narcissism further undermines the strict division between ego and id, because it means that the ego can be charged with a certain form of libido, a narcissistic libido. The self-preserving instinct of the ego remains tied to the ego, but not in the form of rationality, not in the form of control, but in the form of a particular kind of "narcissistic injury". The concentration is then on the

powerlessness of the ego. Narcissism becomes a form of defence mechanism, which is not even registered as such by the ego, because it takes place through libidinal processes. Adorno even goes on to question whether repression can be seen to take place in the rational consciousness of the ego rather than being a formation of narcissistic libido. Narcissism becomes so important for Adorno, because it incarcerates an instinct for self-preservation within the libidinal structure of the human psyche. This is discussed in relation to feelings of helplessness. The problem is not so much the feeling of helplessness in the face of an all-powerful society, because the ego as ego can articulate and express this feeling, but the narcissistic ego falls in love with its own situation of helplessness, such that it doesn't recognise the situation for what it is, it cannot "experience or confront (this) helplessness".[27] As we will see later with the question of reification, it is this inability in current society to grasp immediacy as a mediated form or to experience helplessness as helplessness, which pushes any experience of the truth of society to the margins. In the essay Sociology and Psychology, the margins become that of childhood. Childhood sexuality becomes something that cannot be grasped or adequately conceptualised by the discipline that supposedly discovered it, Freudian psychoanalysis:

> " His magnificent discovery of infantile sexuality will cease to do violence only when we learn to understand the infinitely subtle and utterly sexual impulses of children. In their perceptive world, poles apart from that of the grownups, a fleeting smell or a gesture take on dimensions that the analyst, faithful to adult

criteria, would like to attribute solely to their observation of their parents' coitus."[28]

The Freudian account of narcissism gives Adorno a concrete understanding of how the very core of life can become reified, in the sense that narcissism becomes an identification with that reification. What Adorno could have developed in this essay is that narcissism becomes the form that mimesis takes in modernity. Narcissism as a pathic and helpless identification with that power which takes hold of life is the return in modernity of the form of mimesis as fearful identification of a dominating nature. The twist within the modern form of narcissism is that fear is not the predominant mode for such relation, but the narcissistic love of the very elements within the self that rigidify and open up the self to the constraints of power. Adorno's critique of a commodified culture explores the means in which humans come to desire that which controls and manipulates their desire. The 'life that does not live' is this life that identifies and desires the very forces , which preclude it from living freely.

Damaged Life

For Adorno, any form of experience that can move beyond the reality of identity thinking will have to be something that is itself mediated and dependent on just that reality, if it is not going to become an empty solace. Any interrogation of

modern life, must begin with the estranged and degraded form of life that is being lived:

> "He who wishes to know the truth about life in its immediacy must scrutinize its estranged form, the objective powers that determine individual existence even in its most hidden recesses."[29]

As we have seen, any conception of a life in its immediacy is likely to be problematic in terms of its complicity with a history of domination whose diagnosis both Agamben and Adorno share, and could serve as a mode of smuggling in ideological metaphysical notions such as the sacredness of life. Adorno will specifically address this through his use of a Hegelian notion of "immediacy" and through his use of the concept of reification, so that the life that is referred to throughout Minima Moralia is not a fundamental ground, but a product of history.

The question of reification is fundamental for Adorno in the recuperation of a concept of life that is historical. Exactly what his concept of reification is, and the changes that it undergoes have been a matter of considerable debate in the secondary literature, but it is undoubtedly an important concept for Adorno, and in many ways is the central concept in Minima Moralia, in that "damaged life" is reified life. The concept of reification enables Adorno to construct a Hegelian and historical argument about life and the loss of immediacy.

In Negative Dialectics, Adorno writes that:

" ... subjectification and reification do not merely diverge. They are correlates. The more knowledge is functionalised and made a product of cognition, the more perfectly will its moment of motion be credited to the subject as its activity, while the object becomes the result of the labour that has congealed in it – a dead thing."[30]

What does it mean for subjectification and reification to be correlates ? In Negative Dialectics, Adorno counterposes the Marxian notion of fetishism (der Fetischcharakter der Ware) with the earlier notion of alienation (Entfremdung) and with Lukács's concept of reification (Verdinglichung).[31] For Adorno, the fetishism of commodities relates to an examination of two different forms of objectivity: an object as something that is kept in the foreground as the guiding thread of the project of criticism, what Adorno terms the "object's preponderance", and the distortion of that object into a fetish by the principle of exchange value. The theory of the fetishism of commodities expresses the contradictory thought that, despite the materiality of the world, despite the "preponderance of the object", the material world is also phenomenal, an appearance based on a concealment of social practices and institutions. Reification, for Adorno, is a concept that, if it can still be used, can only be used to refer in this way to the fetishism of commodities, a concept which is fundamentally analyzing contradictions to do with the appearance of objectivity within capitalism. This description of reification serves as a critique of the idealist presuppositions of the concept found in

Lukács's History and Class Consciousness. For Lukács, reification consists in a process whereby the products of human activity come to be seen as natural existents, and essential human qualities which are objectified through free labour become reified in the process of industrial capitalism, where the object is alienated from the labour of the worker. The object, rather than becoming a projection of the human into the world, serves as an alienated entity , which stands in a position of power over human subjects. Furthermore, objects become a form of "second nature", an inert, dead nature that seems to have nothing to do with the human labour that has produced them.

Adorno criticizes this notion as it relies upon the loss of essentially human qualities through the productive process, and thus, only entrenches enlightened thought further, because the whole concept of reification is grounded upon a subjective idealistic philosophical premise; a subject confronting inert matter and attempting to synthesise this matter into objects. Estrangement occurs because humans are not free to synthesise inert matter on the basis of a free, rational choice, rather than under the coercion of need or the profit motive. This whole configuration ignores the presentation of objects as objects for a synthesizing rationality. Reification theory tends towards an idealistic identification of the world as subject and falls into the trap of an already reified form of thought dependent upon a prior subject synthesizing an inert materiality. This is what Adorno means when he terms the "lament over reification" an "epiphenomenon".[32]

Despite this critique, Adorno continues to use the term reification to refer to the state of modern life. Furthermore, there is little engagement on Adorno's part

with the carefully argued account of reification given in Lukács's central chapter of History and Class Consciousness. Adorno tends to read Lukács through a critique of either his early or his later work, when explicitly offering a critique.[33] Some have argued that Adorno's concept of reification changed throughout his writing and that in his later work, he was criticising an earlier position on reification.[34] Martin Jay has argued that the major difference between Adorno and Marx is due to Adorno's undifferentiated and diffuse notion of domination which pre-dates capitalism and therefore becomes extended to the whole process of Enlightenment stretching back to the Ancient Greeks.[35]

The most detailed attempt at reading Adorno's theory of reification comes in Gillian Rose's book The Melancholy Science.[36] Rose outlines the main critiques of the Lukácsian notion of reification, which Adorno provides, all of which are related to an overvaluing of the subject over the object. Rose outlines the following critiques. According to Adorno, Lukács's concept of reification, as we have seen above, verges on a criticism of objectivity as such. This seems a harsh criticism of the Lukács of History and Class Consciousness, whose central philosophical concern in the chapter dealing with reification is with the philosophical problem of the thing-in-itself. Lukács seems completely pre-occupied with philosophical notions of objectivity, and with how the object cannot be made to be identical with the subject, although, admittedly he will posit a subject/object identity. According to Rose's construction of Adorno's critique, Lukács is arguing that the bourgeois categories of thought can be simply eliminated. I don't think this is an accurate critique of Lukács`s position, which is specifically concerned with working

through the bourgeois categories of thought. Arguing that they can be overthrown is not the same as saying that they can be eliminated. Lukács claims that the proletariat can become the subject/object of its own history, and become conscious of its own exploitation and work towards a reconcilement of subject/object. This is clearly a central point of difference between Adorno and Lukács.[37]

What Rose's clear presentation does is delineate points of difference between Lukács and Adorno, and identifies the different ways that these thinkers appropriate the Marxist notion of fetishisation. However, what is often ignored are the affinities between the two thinkers, as well as Adorno's often crude criticisms of Lukács. The central points of agreement between Lukács and Adorno are that reification is a process that is exacerbated and intensified through capitalism. Therefore, although forms of rationality, and economic exploitation occurred prior to capitalism, they are only totalised through the capitalist economy. This totalisation has intensified given the control of the economic system. Therefore, the theory of total reification, which appears nonsensical, in terms that it does not leave any position from which you can criticise capital, should be read as a description of the intensification of control in a totalising way, rather than a completion of the process.

Both thinkers share an understanding of modern life as a form of second nature, but specifically something that is a dead nature. Life is not living because it has been defined in its naturalness as the eternal, the capitalist modes of production which are given as eternal laws. This penetrates into the very consciousness of human beings. Both thinkers privilege aesthetic modes of

understanding as having been foreclosed in modernity, but Adorno is particularly caught in the dilemna that Lukács outlines as follows:

> " ... either the world must be aestheticised ... Or else, the aesthetic principle must be elevated into the principle by which objective reality is shaped: but that would be to mythologise the discovery of intuitive understanding."[38]

Both thinkers attempt to understand modernity immanently, through the use of dialectical thought , which can put into contradiction existing concepts and realities to point beyond itself to something other than the current status quo. There is no escaping the current reified whole, as Lukács argues in very Adornian terms:

> "The reified world appears henceforth quite definitively ... as the only possible world, the only conceptually accessible, comprehensible world vouchsafed to us humans. Whether this gives rise to ecstasy, resignation or despair, whether we search for a path leading to 'life' ... this will do nothing to modify the situation as it is in fact."[39]

Both Adorno and Lukács share an understanding of the irrationality and instability of this reified whole, and of how this can lead to catastrophe. The totality is a peculiar combination of chance and necessity, so that every manifestation of life exhibits this interaction between details that are subject to laws and a totality ruled by chance.

These affinities point to the way of understanding the usage of "life" in Minima Moralia through a dual combination of all of the philosophical antecedents freighting the term. The twist added by Adorno, in opposition to Lukács, is that Adorno fundamentally disagrees that there is a political agent capable of grasping the immediacy of their role within modernity and therefore changing it. For Lukács, reification can be overcome through a process whereby:

> " ... man, who is the foundation and the core of all reified relations, can only be discovered by abolishing the immediacy of those relations. It is always necessary to begin from this immediacy, and from these reified laws."[40]

For Adorno, it is this immediacy that is becoming impossible, and it is certainly not possible to be discovered through the work process of the proletariat. Many of the descriptions of Minima Moralia are concerned precisely with this commodification of humanity in its basic core. The second important difference is, as we have seen, that Adorno's concept of reification is concerned with the process whereby objectivity is constructed through forms of identity thinking. Reification does not only concern the process through which social relations are turned into objects, but also the very relation of subject and nature intrinsic to human labour itself, encapsulated in the idea that humans recognise themselves through the domination of nature. For Adorno, there is a fundamental concept of reification which is concerned with an articulation of this domination that has been central to human history, and intensified through capitalism. To understand

what Adorno means by life in the sense of a life that is reified at its core, it is important to read his early essay on the idea of natural history, as it is here that his grappling with a concept of reification and its relation to ontology first makes an appearance in a specific engagement with the early work of Lukács.

The Idea of Natural History

"The Idea of Natural History" is an early text and some of its claims would be revised by Adorno, although not explicitly, but rather in a shift of language. For example, Adorno talks unabashedly of his aim being to "dialectically overcome the usual antithesis of nature and history", a form of language redolent with a Hegelian notion of sublation that the later negative dialectician would specifically disavow.[41] However, this is a foundational text for two reasons. First, because Adorno is setting out in a programmatic way his thinking on the conceptual pair nature-history, which will continue to be formulated through his writings on politics, aesthetics, epistemology and metaphysics. Second, it is one of the few places in his writing that he engages with the project of ontology in a spirit that is not overtly polemical. The first section of Negative Dialectics and The Jargon of Authenticity are both marked by a tone of anger and a political desire to distance himself from the work of Heidegger, which is not present in "The Idea of Natural History". In fact, the essay stakes out a position, which has a certain sympathy with ontology, but then withdraws from this dialectically.

Adorno grounds his enquiry in the following way:

"I would like to develop what I call the idea of natural-history on the basis of an analysis, or more correctly, an overview of the question of ontology within the current debate. This requires beginning with 'the natural'. For the question of ontology, as it is formulated at present, is none other than what I mean by 'nature'."[42]

Adorno provides a survey of ontological thought prior to Heidegger, and then specifically criticises the Heideggerian project in Being and Time. He sets out the ontological critique of radically historical thought, a critique that he says has dominated the "Frankfurt discussions". This critique argues that any radical historical thought which concerns itself with a content which exclusively relates itself to historical conditions alone will have to account for how history is pre-given as a structure of being. This is clearly a critique that Adorno takes seriously, and it is this critique that is at stake in the essay, and particularly at stake in the idea of nature. However, he is adamant that the Heideggerian concept of historicity will not serve the purpose of grounding history; whereas the ontological critique has power for Adorno, its solution is just another version of idealism. Historicity is idealist for two reasons. First, particularities are related to a structural whole. A structural whole may not be a systematic whole, but it is still idealistic in its basic core belief that the existing can be known and incorporated by the one who constructs the structural whole. Adorno considers the objection that phenomenology would argue that it is not rationalistic, but concerned with the

category of "life", but dismisses this as still idealism in terms of an idealistic irrationalism. The path to a concept of "life" still goes through transcendental subjectivity, even if that is reified into the grand themes of historicity or Being. The attempt to grasp the historical being of Dasein as structural whole in terms of its being-in-the-world, or its relation to the meaning of Being, privileges a structural whole which ignores the particularity of real, historical existence. The unity of subject and object in Heidegger's work as either a foundational ontology of being-in-the-world, or an ontology of the relation of beings to Being, is a posited identity rather than an achieved entity. There is no content that can be given in historical terms to either the prepredicative world of being-in-the-world or the question of the relation of beings to the meaning of Being. There is a tension in Heidegger's work between an interpretation of concrete human existence and its core structure or modes. Heidegger's attention to a phenomenological description is a hermeneutic based upon uncovering formal and core components of a human existence which are not historical in the sense of being constructed by history and culture. This is only an initial phase in an attempt to think history as historicity, as the way in which humans can transcend their historical being and grasp historical reality itself. Adorno attempts to respond to the dual problem of historicity, of how you can ground historical being in terms of the natural, and how a transcendence and grasping of historical being as historical being can take place, but he argues that Heidegger's philosophy fails to provide a framework for such a thought.

The second idealistic component of the ontological use of historicity lies in its concept of "possibility", and the relationship between possibility and actuality. For Adorno, what he terms the project of being takes precedence over facticity, and therefore ontology comes to replicate the antithesis between possibility and actuality inscribed in the Kantian contrast between categorial subjective structure and empirical multiplicity. Ontology cannot give an account of the relation between Being and beings, and is caught in an analogous trap to a Kantian philosophy, which can give no content to the relations of a priori categories and how they apply to the sensible content of thought. Adorno formulated some of these criticisms in his earlier critique of Marcuse's work, Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity. Marcuse's work attempts a mediation between concepts of ontological life and dialectics through a return to Hegel's concept of life as the space of Being. This work is his last overt attempt to mediate between a specific Heideggerian philosophy and a fidelity to Hegelian dialectics, and he conducts it through a reading of the Hegelian concept of life as an ontological concept. Furthermore, Dilthey becomes the link from Hegel to Heidegger in this work, and the concept of historicity is the point at which the ontological meets the ontic through an ontological concept of Life that is made explicit through human praxis.[43] For Adorno, this project still shows too much fidelity to the ontological, as he argues in his critique:

> "Why indeed should the 'ontological' question precede that of the interpretation of the real, historical facts, since Marcuse himself would like to bridge the gap

between ontology and facticity ?"[44]

For Adorno, and ultimately for Marcuse, the attempted bridging of this gap still privileges the ontological moment.

Adorno agrees with the ontological project in the sense that his aim is the "concrete unity of nature and history", but this unity cannot be developed through the postulation of an ahistorical ontology either as foundational ground or as the meaning of Being, but only "developed from the elements of real being itself".[45] This leads to the programmatic statement, which would serve him well throughout his work:

> "If the question of the relation of nature and history is to be seriously posed, then it only offers any chance of solution if it is possible *to comprehend historical being in its most extreme historical determinacy, where it is most historical, as natural being, or if it were possible to comprehend nature as an historical being where it seems to rest most deeply in itself as nature.*"[46]

This statement has certain ambiguities which are continually present in Adorno's work when referring to nature and history. If we read the first pole of the dialectic, that historical being must be read, "in its most extreme historical determinacy", as the natural, what does this mean ? Well, it appears to mean two things in Adorno's work. First, that the historical, in terms of the transient and the product of human construction, must be grounded upon a residue of nature. This is

the ontological moment in the dialectic, in that there is always an ontological question as to the grounding of historical being. The natural is considered here in naturalistic terms as a foundational ground. Second, this statement can be read as a reading of the historical in terms of the natural as "second nature". Reading the historical as natural in this sense reveals how the historical has become eternalised as a natural non-human product in the modes that we examined above in relation to reification. Reading the natural as historical has a more straightforward programme in terms that every ontological ground in naturalistic terms must itself be read as mediated historically by the forces and relations of production.

The second half of the essay concerns two readings of history and nature which conform to Adorno's programmatic statement. The first is from Lukács and concerns the reading of history through nature as "second nature". This is nature that is no longer mute and foreign to the senses, but presents itself as a deadened, alienated, yet complex and meaningful set of "ciphers".[47] It consists of a complex of meaning, but is inert, dead, cannot be brought to life. Lukács's exemplarity for Adorno is the attempt at reading nature as a historical product, as the depositing of human alienation into a world of nature that becomes rotten in its form. Lukács reads history as being transformed into nature, that which is transient is transformed into permanence. Adorno reminds us that there is no first nature for Lukács that is not alienated, that first nature for Lukács is the nature of science, grasped only in terms of our categorical construction and not in itself. The result of the transformation of nature from something living into something that is rotting, or even dead, petrified, is that any act of interpretation, any act of criticism,

becomes a form of awakening. For Adorno, Benjamin serves the second exemplary move in the idea of natural history, precisely by bringing this notion of awakening into the project of philosophical interpretation. Benjamin shows that nature in itself cannot be perceived as underlying substance, but must always be thought of as transitory in itself, that there is no conception of nature without history. Everything that exists must be grasped as a complex interweaving of nature and history, and that which is historical grasped as natural, as that which is natural is grasped as historical.

Adorno explicitly outlines his rapprochement with ontology, although as he states it is a different form of ontology from the work of Heidegger:

> "A double turn, therefore, is made: on one hand I have reduced the ontological problematic to a historical formula and tried to show in what way ontology is to be concretely and historically radicalized. On the other hand I have shown under the aspect of transience, how history itself in a sense presses towards an ontological turn."[48]

This ontological turn, though, must in itself be historicized. However, there is still a difficulty in Adorno's thinking, in that he emphasises an ontological turn, but at the same time resists any fundamental ontology. In terms of a concept of damaged life which is to serve as a critique of contemporary social forms of life, is it not reliant upon a foundational or naturalistic concept of life itself, which can be recovered or uncovered beneath such a damage ? The aspect of the dialectic of

natural history that is not emphasised in his critical appropriation of Lukács and Benjamin in the "Idea of Natural History" is the reading of the historical as natural, in terms of a concept of the natural as residue within the historical, rather than the natural as reifying "second nature". Is there an emphatic concept of natural life in Adorno's work which can serve as a means of recuperating a different mode of subject-object relations than those that pertain within "damaged life"? Such an interpretation of Adorno's thought has been given recently by J.M. Bernstein, in his attempt to give a content to Adorno's concept of life through a critical reading of the work of John McDowell. I think that this reading is important, but causes too many problems for Adorno's critique of ontology for it to stand, but I think such a project of re-enchantment is a plausible reading of Adorno, which I will now move to in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Re-Enchanting Nature

In Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics, Bernstein attempts to give content to Adorno's thinking of nature as the non-identical, through a reading of McDowell's writings on epistemology in Mind and World.[1] Bernstein outlines three distinct, but interrelated meanings of "life" that Adorno uses in Minima Moralia. First, there is the Aristotelian notion of the "good life", an ethical mode of living, which Adorno refers to as previously being a central concern of philosophy. Second, there is, what Bernstein refers to as the "evaluative sense of organic life, the sense of "life" that gives on to vitalism". Third, there is the Hegelian notion of Sittlichkeit, the life of society, with its practices and customs, which is depicted throughout Minima Moralia.[2] It is the second concept of "life", which appears to be, intuitively, the most problematic for a reading of Adorno, in that the notion of an "evaluative sense of organic life" would seem to be a foundational ontology which would negate Adorno's Hegelian insistence that everything is mediated.

Anthropomorphic Nature

Bernstein argues that Adorno gives an account of an "anthropomorphic nature" that has been replaced by enlightenment practices of instrumental reason. However, although this concept of "anthropomorphic nature" is used throughout the book, its definition is difficult to pin down. Bernstein argues that enlightenment defines

myth as anthropomorphism, "the projection of the human onto nature".[3] He makes the claim that the project of demythologization becomes the elimination of anthropomorphic nature, the elimination of:

> " ... anything that might look like it is a part of nature solely because we have collectively placed it there."[4]

There already appears to be a confusion here. In a standard definition, anthropomorphism defines a state of mind, which results in the attribution of human characteristics to non-human entities. Presumably this is why Bernstein refers to animism as a form of "gross anthropomorphism", as it attributes human life, or a human soul to all living things, although animism could be equally defined as the attribution of divine entities, i.e. gods to non-human entities rather than the human projecting onto the non-human. Anthropomorphism does not refer to the project of objectification in the world, which is different from projection, although Bernstein here appears to conflate the two. This discussion is important because Bernstein makes the following strong claim that:

> "Adorno's philosophical project is to resurrect a legitimate anthropomorphism, an anthropomorphic nature that is somewhere between the extremes of myth ... and enlightenment."[5]

What Bernstein means by anthropomorphic nature is an understanding of the human as a part of nature, as involved with nature and dependent upon the material world, and this is something that is lost through the domination of nature presupposed by concept-intuition dualism. Why this is termed anthropomorphic is odd, given that anthropomorphism seems to depend upon a separation of the human from the non-human in order to project human attributes on to the non-human. It is precisely a first stage in the transformation from mythical thinking to enlightenment thought in its attempt to mould and adapt nature. Bernstein's notion seems to be more nature-morphic, in terms of a conception of humanity that moulds itself and adapts itself to nature, rather than vice versa. In his earlier essay, "Re-Enchanting Nature", Bernstein uses the term "circumambient" rather than "anthropomorphic" nature. This seems a better term for the "nature intrinsic in and the counterpart of our embodiment".[6] Bernstein's use of this concept of nature borrows heavily from McDowell's work. In Mind and World, McDowell attempts a solution to the Kantian problem of how thinking can be both free (i.e. spontaneous), yet nevertheless connected to a material world which structures and determines thought. Thoughts must have some content, but that content cannot constrict thoughts to the extent that spontaneity and freedom does not apply in thinking. McDowell attempts to think a form of receptivity in experience that would allow the taking up of matter in a spontaneous way into the "space of reasons", but he wants to do this without any concept of the given, as something that is unproblematically available for the senses to work upon. The problem is the connection between thoughts and intuitions, and how a purely passive

experience can be linked to a spontaneous and active reason. This Kantian problem leads to an oscillation between two unacceptable alternatives for McDowell:

> " ... we are prone to fall into an intolerable oscillation: in one phase we are drawn to a coherentism that cannot make sense of the bearing of thought on objective reality, and in the other phase we recoil into an appeal to the Given, which turns out to be useless."[7]

McDowell's solution to the oscillation is a distinctive concept of experience, and furthermore a distinctively human concept of experience. For McDowell, there is no separation between the operations of the understanding and the passive receptivity of sense experience: human experience is conceptual all the way down. What McDowell means by conceptuality in this sense, is that there can be no separable thinking of spontaneity and receptivity in any form of experience. The rational understanding does not stand apart from a flow of passive intuitions, which are then organised by the mind, but the very form of receptivity involves conceptual understanding. Conceptual understanding is implicated in the very mode of sense perception, of the receiving of sense impression, and it is implicated in the sense that this mode of perception is spontaneous and free. Nature cannot therefore be conceived as a realm of law:

> "Experiences are impressions made by the world on our senses, products of

receptivity: but these impressions themselves already have conceptual content."[8]

What does it mean for sense impressions to have conceptual content ? This is the point that is left rather unclear by McDowell, but he is clear that the actualisation of our nature is at stake, and it is the actualisation of a nature that is distinctively free, in the sense that it is both spontaneous and passive. This involves a distinctive understanding of nature as a realm of spontaneity, rather than the traditional scientific representation of nature as a realm of law. The corollary of this understanding of nature necessarily involves a certain re-enchantment of nature, a re-enchantment that McDowell embraces in terms of a positive concept of "second nature". Second nature is the awareness of how we develop as rational beings through our natural, embodied actualisations of a spontaneous, yet receptive nature. Second nature is the awareness of our development as being grounded in a natural development, but it is a development distinct from non-human animals as it is spontaneous all the way down. Spontaneity is only a problem if conceptuality is configured as a response within the structure of a realm of law, but concept formation should be thought as a way of capturing or configuring our "ways of living".[9] However, our ways of living will be significantly different from other forms of living because what distinguishes humans from nonhuman animals is this level of rational receptivity in all forms of living. McDowell's naturalism is also a thoroughgoing and old-fashioned humanism, in the sense that it sharply differentiates human from nonhuman animals.

The originality of Bernstein's reading of Adorno lies in his usage of McDowell's thought, and it is his achievement that he sees the congruence of elements of Adorno's thinking of nature and McDowell's critique of Kantian epistemology. These congruences lie in an attempt to think the connection between thought and objectivity in a way that privileges the object, without a concept of the given as an unmediated direct access to objectivity. However, there are several problems with McDowell's work, and these problems will also affect any reading of Adorno through McDowell, even given Bernstein's critique of Mind and World.

Bernstein's critique of McDowell is twofold. First, he argues that the concept of second nature, or the recovery of a second nature in Mind and World, ignores the social and historical processes embedded in our inability to realize that the exercise of our reason is dependent upon our embodiment in the world. It is not just a category mistake that we have forgotten that thinking relies upon an embodied relation to the world, but a result of processes of thinking (identity thinking) and world historical processes, primarily industrial and post-industrial capitalism, which have made it almost impossible to recover a second nature in McDowell's sense. Bernstein is arguing that McDowell needs to complement his concept of second nature with a Lukácsian concept of second nature, as his re-enchantment of nature is too easy. It is Bernstein's second critique that leads to particular problems in his interpretation of Adorno. Bernstein is uncomfortable at the clear demarcation between human and nonhuman experience that McDowell draws, for good reasons. McDowell's argument separates all human experience from nonhuman experience, primarily because he wants a grounding of human

experience which is both passive and spontaneous, and thus he wants a base level of responsive experience which is fundamentally conceptual "all the way down". McDowell feels that nonhuman animals are basically responsive and therefore not spontaneous, that passive receptivity and spontaneity are separable in nonhuman animals, but cannot be separated in humans. This distinction seems too sharp, and Bernstein correctly identifies it in his critique, as it does not allow for any understanding of how our animal lives as humans are actualized in our thinking. Bernstein recommends that we replace this central idea, with a notion of our animal selves as grounding our core conceptual capacities:

> " ... passive synthesis should be, in the first instance, associated with accomplishments of animal embodiment rather than the passive exercise of conceptual capacities."[10]

In one sense, this is a straightforward argument, that we share a range of activities, affects and drives with nonhuman animals, and that these will impinge upon the ways that we respond to the world. These will both be positive and negative attributes, in traditional normative terms, so we will share nurturing instincts and violent, aggressive instincts. The problem for Bernstein is that he wants to use these shared attributes in a strong grounding sense as the basis both for our spontaneous thinking and normatively as a basis for ethical thinking. McDowell could do this as he argued that there was no separation between receptivity and spontaneity in any form of human experience. Bernstein correctly

recognizes that this is not argued for and seems unlikely given our common evolutionary heritage with other species, but he wants to retain the strong grounding principle of this animal embodiment. He does this in his book on Adorno through the concept of material inference.[11] He argues that Adorno's references to the non-identical as making a claim through human suffering, can be thought as a strong form of naturalistic grounding of both an ethics and a new form of conceptual thinking. It is in this sense that a new, awakened or enchanted epistemology will configure a more ethical relation to the world. This can occur through the processes of material inference, in the sense that our natural embodied responses to our vulnerability as human bodies can enshrine a different way of living. Bernstein uses the example that the response to someone bleeding badly is to apply a tourniquet, but it is unclear what the grounding is for such a strong inferential response. In fact, Bernstein retains some of the problems of McDowell's arguments in the very project of a grounding of reason in nature; this problem is that there is no argument as to why such a grounding should be inferential. There are two problems here. First, although McDowell and Bernstein reject a certain argument about the given, they still construct arguments that are foundationalist, and second, their foundationalism requires a level of inferential connections that is never argued for. In McDowell's case it is the argument that spontaneity exists all the way down in human experience, and in Bernstein's case it is the argument that certain states of affairs immediately call upon certain responses, due to our animal embodiment, but the whole notion of inference here needs to be examined.[12] Why a certain animal reaction should be enshrined as strongly

inferential rather than another is never explained by Bernstein, but, one could equally outline cases where the injurability of life calls forth responses of violence or indifference. In Precarious Life, Judith Butler explores a similar argument as to the injurability of life as a basis for ethical thinking, through an analysis of Levinas's writings on the "face of the other".[13] What is emblematic, for Butler, in the Levinasian account of the face as the demand of the other, as the representative of the fragility of life, is that it calls forth a conflicting response; the desire both to kill and to respect. There is no straightforward inferential path that leads from the capacity to suffer to a response which respects that, rather than tries to erase it. Both responses are parts of our animal embodiment in the world, and therefore that embodiment cannot provide a straightforward inferential means of grounding either our thinking or our morality.

Bernstein states that "particularity and naturalism" are primary orientations for Adorno, and turns Adorno into a theorist of human nature, and an ethical theorist of human nature at that, with the twist that he is a theorist of human nature when there is no nature, a theorist of the residue of human nature. As he argues:

> " ... anthropomorphic nature has at least been made all but invisible, and, at worst eliminated, become a residue, then all Adorno can do is point to the original setting of reason and subjectivity, itself a highly speculative gesture ..."[14]

Bernstein is accurate in one sense here, in the importance of a speculative concept of life within Adorno's work, but he is wrong in inflecting this speculation in a negative sense as a "gesture". Nor can this speculation be conceived as a re-enchantment of nature, as nature itself is full of conflicting impulses and urges. Nature itself as foundational ground for a humanism in terms of material inference ignores those aspects of the "natural" which may not call forth inferential ethical responses, but instead call for pure responses of self-preservation. This would be the Nietzschean critique of such a naturalism, that the concept of life as nature is indebted to a humanism which subordinates the natural and reads it in purely human terms. Adorno's response would be that the natural needs to be read "where it rests most deeply as natural", as the historical.[15] Although Bernstein does attempt this, with his critique of McDowell's overly optimistic concept of "second nature", his reading of Adorno's naturalism as a foundational ground ultimately leaves us with an ontology which is not historicised.

Bernstein does capture Adorno's concern with a concept of life in Minima Moralia, what he refers to as modernity and the disenchantment of reason leading to a point where it is "sapping the living from life", but I don't think that the explanatory framework that is given in relation to the eradication of an anthropomorphic nature makes any clearer an Adornian understanding of life.[16] The other main problem, in this reading of Adorno through McDowell, is the concept of philosophy involved in McDowell's epistemology. This reading of Adorno remains at the level of epistemology, even if it is a deepened epistemology; the implication being the Kantian one that there are certain things knowable through the

categories of reason and certain things that are unknowable. Even though McDowell consciously sees his project as Hegelian it remains within the bounds of a certain Kantianism in its acceptance of the categories of thinking as they are. The process of the re-enchantment of nature is a clearing of the dense forest of philosophical concepts to open up the relation of mind and nature in a certain form of embodied practice. This foundationalism, though, needs to be supplemented with the Hegelian project of a speculative use of reason, as Robert Stern argues:

> " ... while McDowell wants to vindicate common sense ... Hegel wants much more to vindicate a kind of conception of philosophy that Kant had thought was impossible ... Hegel does not see Kantianism as incompatible because it fails to uphold common sense realism, but rather because it fails to uphold philosophy in general and metaphysics in particular."[17]

Stern's critique is that McDowell's thinking remains at the level of Kantian reason, whereas the core of Hegel's attempt to move beyond Kant lies in an attempt to think philosophy in a speculative sense, rather than as a vindication of reason as it currently stands. This leads McDowell to a certain passive conception of the nature of philosophy, and this leaks into Bernstein's reading of Adorno. Bernstein understands Adorno's dialectics as a dialectics that refers to material inference rather than a dialectics that opens up the space of thinking otherwise through conceptuality. The negative dialectic, for Bernstein, is the form of conceptual thinking which reveals the material moment of the concept that has been

repressed by identity thinking.[18] Whilst this is certainly one way of reading Adorno's emphasis on the preponderance of the object, and on a dialectical experience which opens up thinking towards its material determinants, to describe it in terms of a material inference already determines the status of what is outside current conceptual categories in a way that is illegitimate given Adorno's understanding of a reified life in which there is no space for a posited reconciliation between mind and world. Adorno's thinking of nature is speculative, in the sense that it has to be because there can be no true thinking of nature given the structures of identity thinking. The process of negative dialectics does consist in the "undoing of concept-intuition dualism", but it does not extend to "an elaboration of the notion of material inference", as Bernstein wants it to do.[19] This response to the difficulties in Adorno's thinking of nature is problematic, because despite the disavowing of a notion of nature as foundational, it nevertheless relies on a certain primary naturalism, a certain notion of nature as the given, and, therefore poses three difficulties for any philosophy, like Adorno's, that is self-consciously post-Kantian in the sense of agreeing with some elements of a Hegelian critique of Kant. First, there is the Hegelian critique of the given as unmediated; Adorno, like Hegel, will argue that there is nothing that is not mediated, and the reading of Adorno through a concept of material inference, and the setting of McDowell's thought, relies upon a certain notion of the given, even if it sets itself up as a philosophy that solves this problem. Second, the thinking of a foundational nature is fundamentally ahistorical, as though there are certain elements of fundamental nature that do not change over time and can be

recovered. This thinking lies at the heart of any project of a re-enchantment of nature; the thought that there is something that lies within either our conceptual categories or our animal lives that can be reawakened and thus illuminate a relationship to nature that has been disenchanted. This has to be something fundamentally different to the operations of enlightened thought, as the rational re-enchantment of nature is a contradiction in terms. However, the argument that there are capacities or modes of living unaffected by history, unchanged by our interactions with the world, that can be recovered and, thus, re-enchant nature is highly unlikely. Bernstein recognises this in his critique of Adorno's concept of mimesis, as precisely a capacity that survives the ravages of identity thinking unscathed and ready for recuperation in the experience of the work of art:

> "It is here assumed that mimesis represents an independent, archaic form of cognition that survives only in art. Where this thesis goes wrong is in giving to mimesis a substantiality and independence it does not possess."[20]

Certain aspects of the mimetic faculty are thought to have survived unscathed and can be recuperated in aesthetic experience. This reifies mimesis as a faculty unaffected by social and historical determinants, just as the argument for material inference reifies a certain response to living that can make a direct demand for an inferential response. Third, the reliance on epistemology as the mode of a philosophical rescue of an experience of nature ignores Adorno's attempt at a

speculative philosophy, a philosophy that attempts to change the categories of thinking rather than naturalise them.

Intellectual Experience

The other central critique of McDowell's reading of Kant is that the problematic he sets up within Kant is solved by Kant himself, or there is an attempt at a solution, but in the third rather than the first critique.[21] In Mind and World , McDowell's reading of Kant remains at the level of the Critique of Pure Reason, and doesn't take into account Kant's arguments in the Critique of Judgement. Adorno uses many of the concepts of reflective judging that are outlined in Kant's Critique of Judgement in his definition of an intellectual experience, which is essentially an experience of thought, of the ability of thinking to exist through the determinate negation of what is. The only possibility for such a determinate negation, given the erosion of autonomy through capitalist modernity, exists within the experience of a tension between immersion and withdrawal in objectivity. Adorno uses the following example:

> "Nothing less is asked of the thinker today than that he should be at every moment both within things and outside them. Münchausen pulling himself out of the bog by his pig-tail becomes the pattern of knowledge which wishes to be more than either verification or speculation."[22]

The retention of an idea of truth rests with the possibility of forms of thought, which do not inflict violence to objectivity, which linger with particularity, without resolving into an identifying result. The experience of thinking is therefore something that is always fallible, always subject to error and failure, as it is always a thinking against the limits of what can be thought.

In "The Essay as Form", Adorno articulates a notion of intellectual experience which is encapsulated at its best in the essay form, an experience in which concepts do not form a continuum, but are "interwoven" around the object under scrutiny. This form of thought is a form of experience due to a certain passivity in its nature:

> "The thinker does not actually think but rather makes himself into an arena for intellectual experience, without unraveling it."[23]

Intellectual experience can only function through conceptuality, but can escape the identifying function of conceptuality through its capacity to linger with objects and form patterns and constellations of concepts around the objects. It is an experience that is necessarily fallible, and an exaggeration in the sense that it always overshoots the object. However, it is not clear what the relation is between this intellectual experience and the subjective experience of modernity. This intellectual experience is a withdrawal, but any withdrawal is always compromised by what it withdraws from. Adorno writes as follows:

"If truth has a temporal core, then the full historical content becomes an integral moment in it ... The relationship to experience – and the essay invests experience with as much substance as traditional theory does mere categories – is the relationship to all of history. Merely individual experience, which consciousness takes as its point of departure, since it is what is closest to it, is itself mediated by the overarching experience of historical humankind."[24]

Within the essay form, the individual experience of the object under scrutiny is mediated further by the historical experience of that object, and its reception, and it is only in the relationship between this individual experience and the historical experience that an idea of truth can be attained. It is only through experience, and not as a traditional Kantian approach would stipulate through the categories of the understanding that an idea of truth can be achieved. However, this account of experience has several Kantian overtones if we think of it in relation to the Critique of Judgement. In fact, the third critique can be thought of as the attempt to interrogate the problem of a rule-governed spontaneity, the very problem that preoccupies McDowell. Kant's characterisation of the judgement of taste as a universal judgement free from the determining synthesis of a concept is a model for the experience that Adorno describes. As Kant writes:

"As the subjective universal communicability of the mode of representation in a judgement of taste is to subsist apart from the presupposition of any definite concept, it can be nothing else than the free play of imagination and

understanding."[25]

This mode of experience is intrinsically passive and requires a level of free-floating attention to be given to the object in view, as Kant writes, in language very similar to Adorno's:

> "We dwell on the contemplation of the beautiful because this contemplation strengthens and reproduces itself. The case is analogous (but analogous only) to the way we linger on a charm in the representation of an object which keeps arresting the attention, the mind all the while remaining passive."[26]

David Bell has outlined several elements to the concept of reflective judgement that Kant outlines in the third critique. Aesthetic judging is criterialess, it has no presuppositions or model to start from. It is spontaneous, in the sense of not being rule governed. The judgement is expressive of the object that is presented to the subject, and it is expressive in the sense of being a sensible mode of judging rather than a faculty of rational understanding. Thus aesthetic judgements are non-cognitive, in the sense of not being subsumed under a governing and synthesising concept. Despite being expressive in the sense of being accompanied with a feeling, aesthetic judgements are not invested in the object in the sense of desire or affection, they are essentially disinterested, and because of this they are "presumptively universal", in the sense that they hold for any apprehension of the object in the same circumstances, and can therefore be universally valid. Aesthetic

judgements are purely formal, in the sense that they are solely responses to form rather than matter. Nevertheless, they are synthetic, and do perform a synthesis, but a synthesis without a governing concept. Finally, they are reflective rather than determinative judgements.[27] Adorno's concept of intellectual experience shares many of the facets of this account of aesthetic judgement. His account of intellectual experience relies on the possibility of a constellation of concepts expressing something of the truth of the object through a passive and non-subsumptive experience of the object of interpretation. The interpretation is criterialess in that it does not presuppose any meaning to be uncovered or hold any sure key for unlocking the object of study. The attempt to put something into play, to think not through a continuum of logical progressions, but through the thinker "making himself into an arena for intellectual experience", demands a level of spontaneity and imagination. Intellectual experience is spontaneous in that it demands a passive and free response from the subject. Adorno articulates the relationship of experience to cognition as a relation within cognition rather than counterposed to cognition;

> "Knowledge of the object is brought closer by the act of the subject rending the veil it weaves about the object. It can do this only when, passive, without anxiety, it entrusts itself to its own experience ... Subject is the agent, not the constituent, of object ... "[28]

Experience that gives priority to the object, "entrusts to itself" in the sense that it allows the apprehension of the object to unfold through a lingering with the particularity of the object. Subjective experience is an attempt to encapsulate the forms of human cognition and understanding that are not encapsulated in the idea of the constituting transcendental subject. The subject of experience is therefore always changing in the moment of experience, in the sense that it is the subject that is constituted by the experience rather than the object.

The question of how Adorno's concept of intellectual experience departs from Kant's concept of aesthetic judgement opens up questions which we have seen that Bernstein attempts to resolve through a certain naturalistic reading of Adorno. I have outlined where I think that this elaboration of Adorno's concept of experience causes more problems than it solves. Nevertheless, the problems remain. First, what is the basis for this blind synthesis that occurs in a synthesis without a subsuming rule-governed concept, if it cannot be articulated through a notion of a material inference ? Second, and relatedly, how does this material moment come to matter in thought, how is this intellectual experience determinative as well as reflective, is this intellectual experience the experience of form or matter, or how does it dissolve this distinction ? Finally, there is the question of how this subjective, intellectual experience, can link to a wider conception of historical experience ? How do we construct a concept of a wider historical experience from this intellectual experience particularly given Adorno's critique of any totalised system ?

Having an Experience ?

The question of the basis for a non-conceptual synthesis can be approached via the question of what it means to experience in a fulfilled manner, what does it mean to have an experience, in the strong sense of the word ? In Minima Moralia, Adorno writes of the "fulfilled relation of experience to its subject-matter".[29] This fulfilled relation is not something that Adorno will posit, due to the awareness that a completed experience, given the conditions of life and cognition, as "damaged life" in late capitalism, is usually a false reconciliation. Adorno's thought wants to delineate the outlines of fulfillment through the concept of damage. However, this tension between a concept of damaged life and a resistance to outlining a fulfilled life causes problems for Adorno's negative dialectics, in that such a negatively dialectical proceedure always calls forth what Adorno terms elsewhere an "ontological need".[30] This ontological need, though, is betrayed if it results in an ontology, an account of the life of humans which is an ahistorical and foundational ground. Adorno's proceedure in terms of responding to the ontological need is twofold. First, looking to the past in an attempt to recover elements of a relation between the subject and object which can then be re-awakened in certain forms of experience (primarily aesthetic experience), and second, looking to the future through a utopian concept of experience, which arises aporetically from the possibilities opened up by a negatively dialectical philosophical experience. The question of the basis for such a non-subsumptive synthesis lies in Adorno's recuperation of mimesis as a faculty of reason, a faculty which has been

subordinated historically to the cognitive subsumption of object by concept indicative of predicative thought. The concept of mimesis has a clear reference to a certain concept of life, and also a strong element of a backward looking rescue about its recuperation as a concept. In terms of what it means to have an experience that is mimetic, I want to explore this relation between mimesis and life in terms of experience.

The model for an authentic experience in Adorno's philosophy is aesthetic experience. The mimetic faculty has migrated into a form of aesthetic comportment towards the object, which can model a relation between subject and object that offers a positive concept of fulfilled experience. Such a positive concept of fulfilled experience can be offered through the theory of aesthetics, due to the semblance character of the aesthetic object. As aesthetics deals with artifacts, the reconciled relation of subject and object as outlined through aesthetic comportment, does not betray the diremption at large in reality, because the particular relation of subject and object within aesthetics is not reliant on conceptual subsumption. Mimesis originally arose as a means of coping with the fear of a dominating external nature. When humankind was unable to dominate or control natural events, mimetic activities attempted to model the object or imitate the object as a means of controlling fear. In this sense, mimesis is completely an entrapped and spellbound mode of human comportment, but the particular importance of such a relation between subject and object, is that it is a relation whereby the subject becomes immersed in objectivity, a relation where the subject is immersed to the extent of being dominated. With the increasing ability of

human technology to tame and construct nature in accordance with the needs of human survival and self-preservation, this mimetic comportment migrated into other less interest driven modes of human action, primarily the experience and production of artworks:

> "Art is a refuge for mimetic comportment. In art the subject exposes itself at various levels of autonomy, to its other, separated from it, and yet not altogether separated."[31]

I have outlined above, the problem with this rescue of mimesis as a faculty, that somehow survives unscathed the vicissitudes of history. The problem for Adorno here is a certain concept of experiential fullness, which has a relation to life. Adorno doesn't articulate this fully, but there is a philosopher, John Dewey, who specifically outlines the connection between aesthetic experience and life, in ways that may assist in trying to understand the concept of a fulfilled experience.

Adorno had read Dewey's work, and refers approvingly to it, in several texts.[32] Dewey's book Art and Experience, mirrors many of the concerns of Adorno, in its explicit aim to articulate a realm of aesthetic experience as a model of fulfilled experience that is autonomous, but nevertheless has links with a continuum of human experience. It is the links that Dewey articulates through a concept of life, that can put some flesh on the bones of Adorno's concept of experience, but also raise questions for the recuperation of a concept of experience. In referring to Dewey's work here, I don't want to use this work as a means of substituting

Dewey's account of the relation between experience and life for an account of Adorno's concept of life, when Adorno only has a concept of damaged life, but simply to try and articulate a certain meaning of a fulfilled experience.

Dewey articulates an intense experience as an achievement of "vitality", an achievement of the "organism".[33] Experience only arises through a complex interplay between the human subject and the environment that is characterised by resistance of an object, struggle and achievement. The experience has a certain closure, and a certain rhythm, modelled upon this interaction between subject and life. Experience is therefore both an undergoing, a suffering, and an achievement. Experience thus completes itself, but in its completion as a satisfaction of an initial need, returns in a changed mode. The unity and closure of fulfilled experience does not bring the organism to a stasis, but results in a changed subject and object, and a changed relation between subject and object:

> "Every movement of experience in completing itself recurs to its beginning, since it is a satisfaction of the initial need. But the recurrence is with a difference; it is charged with all the differences the journey out and away from the beginning has made".[34]

Although Dewey doesn't refer to the distinction between Erlebnis and Erfahrung, this description is a good summary of experience as Erfahrung, in the sense of the journey of experience which changes both the subject of experience and the object of the experience in a fulfilled mode that yet opens experience out again

at the end of the experience, as Dewey writes, we "are never wholly free from the sense of something that lies beyond".[35] This experience is not pure in the sense that it is always compromised by needs, desires, and a manipulating relationship towards the object. Nevertheless, a certain natural attitude is the prerequisite to the pure experience that is aesthetic experience, a natural attitude characterised by Dewey, in the terms of "rhythm", as it is only through a rhythmic relation between the subject and her environment, that the precondition for a certain comportment towards the aesthetic object can take place. Aesthetic experience is therefore not a separate realm to everyday experience, but is founded on certain modes of living, due to the relation between rhythm, form and expression that occur in the natural attitude and are sublimated in an aesthetic experience. Dewey articulates the experience of a work of art in the following way:

> "When the structure of the object is such that its force interacts happily (but not easily) with the energies that issue from the experience itself: when their mutual affinities and antagonisms work together to bring about a substance that develops cumulatively and surely (but not too steadily) toward a fulfilling of impulsions and tensions, then indeed there is a work of art ..."[36]

The concept of a relation between subject and environment that results in a rhythmic experience of resistance, tension and completion verges on a fundamental ontology, unless there is a historical account of this experience. Dewey gives a broad historical account of a certain tendency towards a decay in experience

caused by the replacement of an overload of information in modernity, rather than the tense achievement of a unity of experience. He argues that:

> " ... we yield to conditions of living that force sense to remain an excitation on the surface ... Identification nods and passes on. Or it marks a dead spot in experience that is merely filled in. The extent to which the process of living in any day or hour is reduced to labelling situations, events and objects as 'so and so' in mere succession marks the cessation of a life that is conscious experience. Continuities realised in an individual, discrete form are the essence of the latter".[37]

The tension in this account is between a traditional concept of experience and an ontological concept of experience. It is a tension that we will trace in the next chapter in relation to accounts of the decay of experience in modernity. The problem with a concept of mimesis for Adorno, as a mimetic comportment that has migrated into aesthetics, is that as a foundation for a synthesis that is not subsumptive, it becomes purely ontological itself. If it is historicised then it becomes more open as to how such a relation returns as either a pathic and fearful imitation, or a tender and non-subsumptive imitation. The account of mimesis as "nonconceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other", may work as an account of a certain form of aesthetic experience, but the gap between aesthetic and everyday experience is more difficult to bridge, unless an ontological argument is posited in terms of a fundamental mode of human

relation in the world, a form of "being-in-the-world" that has magically remained unaffected through history.[38] At times, Adorno does not historicise this notion of mimesis but articulates it as a form of rationality that has been forgotten but can be magically re-awakened through aesthetic experience. In a sense, this is the backward looking and regressive account of a relation between experience and life. However, Adorno does give a more speculative account of mimesis in Aesthetic Theory, an account of mimesis as a shudder (an Erschütterung (shattering) or, at other times, Schauer), which results in an awakening to the natural not as an ontological prepredicative lifeworld, but the natural as that which speculatively escapes the immanence of the historical.

Shudder

Adorno writes about the shudder in aesthetic experience, as a form of individual experience which desubjectifies, an experience of immersion and loss in the object that is frightening in its destabilising of the ego, but also an awakening to other possibilities and relations between subject and object. This is a moment of immediacy, but it would be wrong to characterise it as a lived experience in terms of an Erlebnis. Although the shudder as the dissolution of the ego in the work of art is instantaneous, its instantaneity is dependent on a full, comprehending consciousness (experience as Erfahrung). There can be no experience of the shudder, unless there is a strong individual who understands and approaches the work of art in terms of its tradition, its unfolding, and its relation to its historical

context. However, the experience of the shudder dislocates the egocentric nature of subjective experience in the sense that there is no "particular satisfaction for the I" in this experience.[39] This is not an intuitive grasp of the intentions of the artist, or a direct revelation of the content of the artwork as being personally meaningful in terms of the recipient's life. These two responses would remain at a level of Erlebnis. The relation between the shudder and experience is a non-conceptual experience of a completely new form of experience, an individual experience that is without a dominating ego:

> "Shudder, radically opposed to the conventional idea of experience (Erlebnis) provides no particular satisfaction for the I; it bears no similarity to desire. Rather, it is a memento of the liquidation of the I, which, shaken, perceives its own limitedness and finitude. This experience (Erfahrung) is contrary to the weakening of the I that the culture industry manipulates."[40]

Adorno attempts to articulate an openness of experience that is primarily individual, but at the same time dislocates the individual from a strong and dominating ego as self-preservation. This is a desubjectifying moment, but not analogous to the weakening of the subject by the manipulations of the culture industry. The passivity and withering of experience fostered by the culture industry, is a withering which reduces the ability of the subject to adopt any kind of differentiating or critical stance towards the object. A critical moment, and therefore a strong ego, is paramount for any form of experience, in the sense that

without a critical distance, the subject becomes a passive sponge for stimuli. However, the shudder intimates a form of individual experience that might move beyond the ego, not in terms of an identity of subject and object, but in terms of a relation between subject and object that is not dependent on domination and need, a truly free relation. This shudder is a trace of "life" in an emphatic sense, life in the sense of a reconciled relation between subject and object that is non-subsumptive. The life that is expressed here is the possibility of a different form of subjectivation in which the human does not lose her relation to her own body and to the natural world, in the process of a subjective formation. However, it is also an achievement, in the sense of experience as Erfahrung, in that it is only through the production and creation of a strong ego, that the "irruption of objectivity into subjective consciousness", can be achieved.[41]

The question, who is having the experience in this sense becomes radicalised in the form of a paradox. This is a "subjective experience against the I".[42] As a subjective experience, it is dependent upon a certain tradition and community to form itself as experience, and this tradition and community also represses itself as experience, in that it has a repressive side. The speculative experience of a life that can overcome such a dialectic is experienced in the aesthetic object, through this emphatic yet individual experience that registers itself as both a protest against the loss of ego and a pleasure at a complete immersion in objectivity. This immersion, though is only momentary:

"For a few moments the 'I' becomes aware, in real terms, of the possibility of

letting self-preservation fall away, though it does not actually succeed in realising this possibility ... that it itself is not ultimate, but semblance."[43]

Rather than foundation for experience, the shudder is a revealing outcome of a process of experience. This is a moment of immediacy, achieved through an attempt by the subject to model the object, but this immediacy is completely speculative in the sense that it is a glimpse of a different mode of being rather than a fulfilled achievement. It is also a speculative moment that is realised somatically, through a bodily reaction, but one that is disconnected from the usual motors and drives of bodily action such as desire. It is a model of an embodied yet disinterested response, what Adorno terms as the joining of "eros and knowledge".[44] Therefore, if we can talk about life in the subject it is only in terms of this achieved experience of the "shudder":

" ... life in the subject is nothing but what shudders ... Consciousness without shudder is reified consciousness. That shudder in which subjectivity stirs without yet being subjectivity is the act of being touched by the other."[45]

This fulfilled experience is not a foundation or a prerequisite, but a speculative yet bodily experience. The problem for Adorno is that it depends upon a certain formation of subjective experience in traditional terms, as a continuity of consciousness over time, as a subject which is able to order, assimilate and develop its experience, and its relation to a tradition in terms of both appropriation

and critique. The speculative experience that is the "shudder" is dependent on the possibility of a subjective experience formed through a certain relation between the subject and the environment, a relation described by Dewey. This relation is historically produced in terms of a traditional concept of experience, in terms of a subject who, in a rhythmic, yet harmonious relation with the world, is able over time to unify and absorb a sedimented tradition, in order to move beyond that tradition. The problem for Adorno is that in his account of the decay of experience, it is just such a concept of experience that is being lost, and, thus, if the speculative experience of the shudder in the reception of the artwork, or the experience of possibility in a process of negative dialectics, is dependent upon such a concept of traditional experience, the speculation will disappear alongside its foundation in subjective experience. It is to this decay of experience that we now turn.

Chapter Five: The Decay Of Experience

In this chapter I will reconstruct the different accounts that Adorno, Benjamin and Agamben give of the decay of experience in modernity. The purpose of outlining these accounts is to understand their respective concepts of experience, and their common usage as both a decay of experience and an account of an experience that can be used as a means of rescuing a form of life in modernity.

In a recently published essay, Martin Jay outlines three central questions for what he terms the Frankfurt School's "lament" over the decay of experience.[1] The first question concerns the historical point at which this crisis occurred and whether the crisis can have been caused by a "historical event or process, ... or is something more ontological at issue ?"[2] This issue was the main focus of the first two chapters of the present work on Auschwitz and the concept of survival in Agamben's and Adorno's writings. All three thinkers do argue in different ways that it is a historical process that has produced the crisis for experience, but there are fundamental differences in the interplay of history and ontology.

The second question that Jay poses is as follows:

> " Is there, moreover, a coherent and unified notion of experience assumed by the lament, or does the word function in different ways in different contexts?"[3]

This question will guide the first two sections of this chapter which will begin with an analysis of the philosophical concepts of experience that are at work in the different accounts of decay or ruin given by Adorno, Benjamin and Agamben. It will focus on the concepts of Erlebnis and Erfahrung as the two differing concepts of experience that serve as a mode of accounting for the decay of experience in modernity and of the differing ways of attempting to rescue a concept of experience.

Knowledge, Authority, Experience

In his essay entitled "Infancy and History", Giorgio Agamben gives a genealogy of the concept of experience, that charts its transformation from an authoritative concept to something that is essentially incomplete and insatiable. This genealogy begins with the statement that experience at its core is not a matter of knowledge, but rather of authority, and this authority is related to the power of narration. Experience is therefore something that is expropriated by science and transformed into the experiment. The form in which experience gained its authority was that of the maxim or the proverb, but in its translation into science, paradigmatically with the work of Francis Bacon, experience becomes a tool, a method for the acquisition of knowledge rather than the authoritative transmission of experience itself.

Adorno's relation to Francis Bacon, and to his place in a transformation of experience is rather more dialectical. In his inaugural lecture to the philosophy

faculty of the University of Frankfurt, he refers in a positive light to what he terms "that old concept of philosophy which was formulated by Bacon", as the "ars inveniendi (art of invention)".[4] For Adorno, the aspect of this concept of experience and of science as the art of invention that is positive is the imaginative reconstruction of the material of the natural sciences to produce something new through the configuration of that material, by the use of the imagination, what Adorno terms "exact imagination".[5] In his early project of interpretation without intentional meaning, Adorno sees Bacon's creative and inventive concept of experience as a concept of experience that has been lost in idealism: experience as the invention of the new through the imaginative, yet immanent configuration of matter. This process is immanent because it remains with the material at hand, and attempts a free reconstruction of that matter, rather than an attempt to impose a meaning from outside. However, it is precisely this form of experience that Agamben reads as an expropriation of experience.

Two things happen with this "expropriation" of experience according to Agamben. First, experience loses its authority, and second, it becomes displaced from the subject onto the methodology of measuring the natural world. There is, for Agamben, a concept of traditional experience, which relates itself to the authority of a life which cannot be measured or instrumentalised, and therefore cannot be talked about in terms of its certainty, but rather lies in the span of a human life approaching the limit of its death:

"Traditional experience ... remains faithful to this separation of experience

and science, human knowledge and divine knowledge. It is in fact the experience of the boundary between these two spheres. This boundary is death. Hence Montaigne can formulate the ultimate goal of experience as a nearing to death – that is, man's advance to maturity through an anticipation of death as the extreme limit of experience".[6]

Agamben's account is clearly influenced by Walter Benjamin's argument about the decline of experience in his essay on "The Storyteller". Benjamin describes the situation in the following way:

"Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end - unfolding the views of himself under which he has encountered himself without being aware of it - suddenly in his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in dying possesses for the living around him. This authority is at the very source of the story."[7]

The temporal modalities contained in this experience are complicated in that they unfold through a momentary upsurge of authoritative experience through the series of images of a life as a whole, which comes unbidden with the shock of an impending death. Thus we have the memory, which is not willed, but comes unbidden, but is a memory of a tradition in the form of a life. Alongside this, there is the emergence of something new, unspecified and momentary, the

"unforgettable", which is imparted through the expressions and looks of the dying man. What is transmitted in this experience is therefore not something easily conceptualisable or communicable, but can be characterised as the experience of the man's life. Experience, in this sense, appears as a mixture of a sudden, and unwilled revelation which contains an authority through its narration to a community of listeners. Traditional experience has its model in the goal of achieving maturity through the approach of impending death. The aim was an "achieved totality of experience", which Benjamin cites in the passage above. Experience was something that it was possible to possess, but with the referral of all experience to the modern subject, whose model of experience is scientific knowledge, a knowledge which is in principle endless and never acquired in full, experience becomes something that it is never possible to have but only possible to undergo, and loses all authority. Experience ceases to be the ne plus ultra of knowledge, and becomes the path towards knowledge.

The story being told is of a historical trajectory in terms of the transformation of experience from a form of fulfilled experience, which rested on an understanding of shared tradition and an ability to form and narrate that tradition through the authority of a privileged insight. The transformation of the subject of experience is narrated differently in Agamben's work and in Benjamin's essay; Benjamin configures this transformation through the various changes in the subjective experience of modernity, particularly the technical means of reproducing and disseminating information, whereas for Agamben it is paradigmatically the project of science which expropriates experience as authority. What is left unclear

in both accounts is the status of this traditional experience, as to whether it is somehow more authentic than the experience of modernity. Although often configured as a fall from grace, this loss of experience should not be immediately associated with a decline from an authentic to an inauthentic experience, but, rather as the loss of a place in the world.

In the opening section of Dialectic of Enlightenment, Adorno and Horkheimer situate Bacon in a similar way to Agamben as the author of a concept of experience as the foundation of the project of modern science, which inaugurates the domination of subjectivity:

> "Bacon's view was appropriate to the scientific attitude that prevailed after him. The concordance between the mind of man and the nature of things that he had in mind is patriarchal: the human mind, which overcomes superstition, is to hold sway over a disenchanted nature. Knowledge, which is power, knows no obstacles ..."[8]

However, even at this point of most criticism, there is something in Bacon's concept of concordance between humans and nature relating to the chance discoveries of material that means that his concept of experience does not totally rest on an identifying procedure. The "experimental philosophy" still retains that element of a concept of experience where everything is open, and the outcome and intentions of any scientific procedure can be held suspended.[9] It is precisely this openness of experience that Agamben reads as an expropriation of experience

in the sense of a loss of authority, and in an analogous but contrasting way he reads this expropriation of experience through what he terms a "reversal of the status of the imagination."[10]

For Agamben, the expropriation of experience corresponds to an expropriation of imagination. In Antiquity, imagination was the supreme medium of knowledge, serving as the mediating element between the sense and the intellect. Although he refers to this as mediation, he doesn't mean it in terms of Hegelian mediation, or even in terms of the Kantian schematism, but rather the imagination as that which guarantees the real, that which provides the "coincidence of subjective and objective."[11] The imagination in this sense becomes replaced in the new science by the concept of experience, as imagination is removed to the realm of the "hallucinatory". Agamben concludes his argument in the following way:

> "Between the new ego and the corporeal world, between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* there is no need for any mediation. The resulting expropriation of the imagination is made evident in the new way of characterising its nature: while in the past it was not a 'subjective' thing, but was rather the coincidence of the subjective and objective, of internal and external, of the sensible and the intelligible, now it is its combinatory and hallucinatory character, to which Antiquity gave secondary importance, that is given primacy. From having been the subject of experience the phantasm becomes the subject of mental alienation, visions and magical phenomena – in other words, everything that is excluded by real experience."[12]

Agamben conflates and condenses a whole series of meanings of the imagination here, particularly in the "combinatory and hallucinatory" character of the imagination. The "combinatory" character of the imagination refers to a Kantian concept of the imagination combining the manifold of intuitions through the forms of intuition (space and time) to provide the object of perception. The "hallucinatory" character of imagination seems to refer to the process of imagination as something that is unreal, and, perhaps related to the notion of fantasy in the unconscious. Now, it is clear that there is a hallucinatory moment in the Kantian imagination, in the sense that the imagination serves the purpose of making present for the faculty of the understanding the synthesis of empirical intuitions, a combination of intuitions to form the object of perception. This making present depends on the imagination reconstructing and joining together disconnected intuitions into a present moment in order for this manifold to be apprehended as an object for the understanding. However, it is far from clear that this equates with the exclusion of imagination from experience, rather imagination gains a dual character as precisely that which is most needed as the mediation between the categories of the understanding and the contents of sensible intuition, and that which is most unreal as it cannot be characterised in terms of the Kantian system. For Agamben, the "old subject of experience" returns in Kant, but, in a new way, and it is to the contrasting responses to the Kantian concept of experience that we must now turn in more detail..

Kantian Experience and the Philosophy to Come

Kant's concept of experience is exemplary for Agamben as it is the last place "where the question of experience within western metaphysics is accessible in its pure form – that is without its contradictions being hidden."[13] The problem of experience, as Agamben understands it, is the split between a traditional concept of experience, which is exemplified by a subject who has experience rather than undergoes a process of experience. Experience has its correlation here in authority not certainty, not knowledge in the sense of scientific understanding of the world, but what Benjamin terms "wisdom".[14] This old subject of experience is someone who retains his authority to tell a story from his own life and his connections with the lives of others, and has experience to the extent that the telling of the story consumes his life in the process of narration. Agamben configures the split in the subject of experience inaugurated by a dissolution of this traditional authoritative experience in relation to Don Quixote, who "befuddled by a spell", can no longer have an experience but only undergo experience, whereas Sancho Panza, the old subject of experience, has experience without undergoing it.[15] This split in experience emerges in the Kantian philosophy in the split between transcendental and empirical, in the terms of the epistemological problem of securing the grounds of knowledge. The Kantian philosophy is exemplary for Agamben because in its thinking of the subject it incorporates this split between an old subject of experience (in terms of the empirical "I"), and the new subject of experience (in terms of the transcendental "I think"). The authoritative subject

of experience was not concerned with the transcendental problem, the necessity to ground the conditions for the possibility of their experience. It is this move to a transcendental realm that fundamentally creates an empty form of experience as the condition for the possibility of experience. The aporia that results from Kant's attempt to identify the possibility of experience with the certainty of natural science is that the subject of experience disappears completely in the split between transcendental and empirical:

> "For Kant, since the transcendental subject cannot know an object (for this it needs the intuition furnished by sensory experience, being in itself incapable of intuition), but can only *think it*, it therefore cannot even know itself as a substantial rationality ..."[16]

Thus, the Kantian concept of experience reaches the strange conclusion of positing the problem of experience "in terms of the experienceable."[17] The "inexperienceable" operates in terms of both the thing-in-itself, and the transcendental subject of knowledge, the "I think" that accompanies all representations. Agamben's genealogy of experience results at this point in the story of the decline of experience from authority into experience as the inexperienceable, albeit in a search for certainty within the framework of the project of natural science.

There is still a question as to how to understand this authority of experience that Agamben takes from Benjamin's "Storyteller" essay. One way of

understanding this is in relation to another essay by Benjamin, an essay specifically figured as a critique of the Kantian concept of experience. In his essay "On the Programme of the Coming Philosophy", Benjamin provides a groundwork for his concept of experience and the possibility of a new form of experience, an experience yet to come that will pass through a Kantian typology. The crucial element within the Kantian typology for Benjamin is the relation between subjects and objects, which is never overcome by Kant, and related to that the problem of how knowledge and experience can be configured through an empirical consciousness. Benjamin's strategy in the essay is twofold. First, to articulate the possibility of a concept of experience that overcomes the distinction between subject and object, and, second, to relate this to history in the form of its appearance in time. The concept of experience that Benjamin uses in the essay looks backwards to a form of fundamental experience based on an understanding of language and forwards to a concept of experience that will arise through a deepening and an overcoming of the Kantian categories. Benjamin's concept of experience is one of a fulfillment and unity that somehow lies behind the categories of the understanding. He makes the relation to theology explicit:

> "Such a philosophy in its universal element would either itself be designated as theology or would be superordinated to theology to the extent that it contains historically philosophical elements."[18]

Benjamin's early project in terms of the concept of experience can be articulated in the following way. First, there is a foundational concept of experience, the traditional concept of experience that Agamben outlines, which relates to a certain neo- Platonism in Benjamin's early theory of language. This emphatic concept of experience relates to a theory of the Name, which somehow expresses what is named: the coincidence of subject and object through a process of language as purely expressive rather than identifying. Although Agamben doesn't discuss Benjamin's theory of language, he shares a certain foundationalism in terms of a traditional concept of experience which resides in a coincidence of subject and object, but a coincidence that doesn't rely on the identifying procedures of epistemology.

The second concept of experience for Benjamin is a concept that can be configured only through the Kantian categories; there is no return to a theological concept of coincidence between thing and name, but the orientation of this project guides the idea of a way of thinking the subject and object together, which can move beyond the polarities of subject and object. As he writes:

> " ... besides the concept of synthesis, another concept, that of a certain nonsynthesis of two concepts in another, will become very important systematically, since another relation between thesis and antithesis is possible besides synthesis."[19]

This is the productive moment in Benjamin's concept of experience, the idea of an experience to come. The third moment in this concept of experience relates it to its appearance in history; that the metaphysical concept of experience must be related in some way to its appearance in time:

> "This experience, in its total structure, had simply not been made manifest to philosophers as something singularly temporal ..."[20]

This project of the temporality of metaphysical experience would become more important to Benjamin throughout his later work, and would inflect his neo-Platonism, but not to the extent that it disappears.

For both Benjamin and Agamben, the Kantian concept of experience serves as both the terminus for a certain emphatic concept of experience, in the terms that Kant banishes the possibility of any linking of an emphatic or metaphysical experience with its appearance in history, and conversely, the point at which a new seed of experience might germinate, as the Kantian thinking of the subject and object pushes the concept of experience to a point of extreme contradiction. Adorno shares some of these concerns in his characterisation of Kantian philosophy, but his consideration of Kant's concept of experience pushes him in a different direction.

Kantian Stammering: The Experience of the Transcendental

In his lectures on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, Adorno devotes four separate lectures to the concept of the transcendental as it progresses through Kant's opus.[21] For Adorno, the Kantian concept of the transcendental functions as a block in Kant's philosophical project, a block that operates in two directions. First, the block operates as a ban on metaphysical experience, in the sense that all experience for Kant must come from the empirical realm; there can be no purely intellectual intuitions. However, as we have seen, the transcendental "I think" is precisely that which it is impossible to account for in its relation to the empirical realm within Kant's philosophy. What occurs with the transcendental "I think", and appears in its most clear form here, is the failure of Kant's dual attempt to base all knowledge on intuitions, and at the same time to outline a priori categories which will apply to these intuitions. The central experience of Kant's philosophy is the contradiction between these two approaches:

> "The path chosen by Kant instead is in actual fact a path constructed of pure concepts: he seeks through pure thought what absolutely must be thought if experience is to be at all possible. But such a process of logical deduction from pure thought is something he himself prohibits."[22]

It is in the thinking of the transcendental "I think" that Kantian philosophy comes up against the first block, the block of thinking the transcendent as something beyond the contents of experience. The aim of Kant's concept of the transcendental was to wring this sense of transcendence from the transcendental.

The concept of the transcendental was supposed to secure a realm of something prior to experience, something which must be the case for any experience to be possible, but not transcendent in the sense of a speculative thinking of something beyond experience. However, it is with the "I think" that these two meanings coincide again, however much Kant wishes to keep them apart:

> " ... the 'I think' is emancipated from everything connecting to a merely empirical 'I' that is supposed to be contained in it. The moment we take this step it is hardly possible to arrive at any other conclusion than of elevating this spirit to the status of absolute spirit."[23]

This leads on to the Fichtean postulate of the absolute subject. However, the block does not just result in this gesture towards the thinking of a metaphysical experience that is forbidden, but also works in the reverse direction towards the realm of objectivity, of materialism. The aporetic concepts of Kantian philosophy result from the attempt of every theory of knowledge to resolve the problems of the non-identity of subject and object in terms of a "shift" towards the subject, and to base all knowledge on the subject. Adorno thus characterises the transcendental sphere, and the history of epistemology generally, as a system of credit which can never be redeemed, because the history of philosophy does not recognise that the object cannot be forced to coincide with the subject, and thus each concept fails in its identifying procedure:

> "Each concept may be said to be an IOU that can be redeemed only by a further concept. Expressed more vulgarly, epistemology resembles the man who can only block up one hole by digging another."[24]

Kant's attempt to say what cannot be said is therefore twofold. First, there is nothing beyond experience in terms of a concept of transcendence, but, equally, there is no way of accounting for the object as it is, as every epistemology eventually rests on an identifying subject. There is an ongoing critique in Adorno's lectures of any separation of a constituens from a constitutum, and this is related to the concept of the transcendental, which is dependent on an idea of empirical individuality. There can be no discussion of the transcendental 'I' without a concept of empirical individuality. Adorno characterises the experience of Kant's philosophy as a form of stammering:

> "If I am not mistaken, we are looking here at the deepest aspect of Kant, at his attempt to say what cannot be said – and his entire philosophy is nothing more than a form of stammering, infinitely expanded and elevated. Like the act of stammering, it is a form of Dada, the attempt to say what actually cannot be said."[25]

Like Agamben, Adorno identifies the transcendental "I think" as the place in which the Kantian system expresses the problem of experience as the inexperienceable, but in Adorno, it is not conceived in the sense of a split between

knowledge and authority, but rather an inevitable aporia within the concepts of philosophy themselves. The sense of authority appears in Adorno's reading in his interpretation of Kant's critique as an attempt to salvage ontology, in the form of the absolute and timeless knowledge of the objects of experience that are given to us in the form of intuition. It is the failure of the system that reveals the problem inherent in any rescue of ontology, that the concept of a truth as a timeless truth, whether conceived of speculatively as beyond experience in the form of a transcendence, or transcendentally in the forms of what is prior to experience, cannot provide a grounding for a philosophy which wants to secure the objective world. The failure of the salvaging of ontology in the Critique of Pure Reason does not mean a loss of experience for Adorno, but the seeds of an experience to come, which would result in a thinking that is historical, and alert to the non-identity of subject and object, a thinking that is at the core of the experience of Hegel's philosophy.

The Experience of Hegel's Philosophy

In their respective genealogies of the concept of experience, Agamben and Adorno both situate Kant's attempt at a transcendental grounding of empirical experience as a key stage in the history of the philosophical concept of experience, but their different attitudes to the Kantian problem of the transcendental result in different evaluations of Hegelian experience. For Agamben, Kantian experience is the last place where the question of experience is to be observed in its purest form,

"without its contradictions being hidden".[26] The direction that the concept of experience takes in post-Kantian philosophy in terms of the absolute subject hides the traditional concept of experience that was expressed in the split between the transcendental and the empirical 'I'. For Agamben, Hegelian phenomenology, which elevates the concept of experience as the method of philosophy, ultimately equates experience with the very essence of the subject, but in a way in which the subject's essence is always escaping it, through the enshrining of the concept of experience as negativity:

> "Thus experience here is simply the name for a basic characteristic of consciousness: its essential negativity, its always being what it has not yet become."[27]

This is the final loss of experience in its traditional sense, because the negativity of experience, which previously resided outside the subject in death, becomes internalised into the constitution of consciousness itself. Therefore, it is impossible for anyone to have experience, but only to undergo a process of experience, thus the description of the phenomenology of spirit as the science of the experience of consciousness. Agamben reads Hegelian experience as the fundamental loss of the authority of experience with its transposition from the realm of wisdom and narration, to that of the path of experience. It is the "negative and unattainable character of experience" incorporated in the methodology of the dialectic that finally extirpates the traditional concept of experience and institutes a concept of

experience which is by its very definition impossible to ever have.[28] This unattainable character of experience has its somatic corollary in the split between need and desire that Agamben configures as a result of the extirpation of the imagination from the concept of experience. Need as related to the satisfaction of corporeal needs and desire as insatiable and related to the imagination; these two entities were previously united in the traditional concept of experience, and only become sundered with the extirpation of the role of the imagination as mediator between subject and object. Hegel's use of desire as the motor for the recognition of self-consciousness in the Phenomenology of Spirit, incorporates this insatiability as the very mode of epistemology; "desire, - which emerges, significantly, as the first moment of self-consciousness – can only try to negate its own object, but never finds satisfaction in it".[29] This is why, as we will see later, Agamben proposes a critique of all dialectical thinking as a necessity for the rescue of any concept of experience in modernity.

Adorno's essay on "The Experiential Content of Hegel's Philosophy" situates the experience of Hegel's philosophy, and, particularly the experience of the dialectic as a process with no definitive absolute result as the point in the genealogy of the concept of experience that the concept gains its true worth as the critique of existing social reality. Adorno agrees with Agamben that a new concept of experience arises in Hegelian philosophy, a concept which is produced by the self-reflexive moment of consciousness within Hegel's concept of experience as outlined in the Phenomenology of Spirit:

"This dialectical movement which consciousness exercises on its self – on its knowledge as well as its object – is, in so far as the new, true object emerges to consciousness as the result of it, precisely that which is called experience."[30]

This doubling of consciousness produces a new concept of experience in the sense that it produces an object which was not considered by Kant, "the object of reflection".[31] Hegelian experience is produced in the tension between knowledge of the object and knowledge of the process of apprehending the object as it appears to consciousness. The radical novelty of this concept of experience is that it becomes historical, in the sense that both the consciousness attempting to know itself and the object appear and are changed throughout history. The experience is precisely insatiable, in the sense that there is always a moment of non-identity in the attempt of consciousness to know its object, and to know itself as apprehending the object. Of course, the process of experience as journey in Hegel's philosophy culminates in an authority of experience at the end of the process, in the result of an absolute knowledge, which is the failure of Hegel's philosophy for Adorno.

The self-reflection of Hegelian philosophy also involves experience as a turn towards the object due to the failed nature of any attempt to fully identify the object as such. This self-reflection as experience has a materialist orientation:

" ... the reflection of reflection, the doubling of philosophical consciousness, is

> no mere play of thought unleashed ... In that consciousness recalls, through self-reflection, how it has failed to capture reality, how it has mutilated things with its ordering concepts ..."[32]

The self-reflection of Hegelian experience therefore has a number of consequences that are important for Adorno's concept of experience. First, and in stark contrast to Heidegger's reading of Hegel, Adorno argues that experience cannot be understood as something ontological in the sense of something that names Being, or something that is the Name that lies before language. This is ultimately Heidegger's reading of Hegel's concept of experience, that the concept names Being as something that is always involved in moving beyond itself. For Heidegger, experience "expresses what 'being' in the term 'being conscious' means".[33] The corollary to this is that philosophical experience cannot be understood in the phenomenological sense as an ur-experience, a transcendental ground for all other forms of experience. The most important lesson of Hegel's concept of experience is that it dispenses with all forms of ontological or transcendental foundationalism in philosophy through the concept of mediation. There is no experience of immediacy, of the object as such or the subject as such, or any originary experience that can be appropriated as event in history. There is only the mediation between subject and object as it appears and is conditioned by history. The important moment in Hegel's concept of experience is the reflective moment that enables us to reveal the non-identity between subject and object, and renew an orientation towards objectivity as such. The contradictions

within thought and within social reality are expressed by this new concept of experience which introduces a mobility into the forms of conceptuality themselves:

> "The movement of the concept is not a sophistical manipulation that would insert changing meanings into it from the outside but rather the ever-present consciousness of both the identity of and the inevitable difference between the concept and what it is supposed to express, a consciousness that animates all genuine knowledge."[34]

The contradiction of thought is constructed through both a consciousness of an identity between concept and thing and the inevitable difference between the concept and what it wants to express, the truth of the object. This is the contradiction of thought itself, and a reflection of contradictions in social reality, a social reality which both expresses forms of reconciliation and falsifies them at the same time. Adorno's common example is the exchange principle in capitalism, which both expresses a concept of equality in the exchange of equivalents, but at the same time covers up the exploitation in the social process that lies behind such exchange. Contradiction, in Hegelian experience, is always a reference to the form of thinking in a given reality, but a form of thinking set free, in the sense that awareness of contradiction involves the mobility of the concept that Adorno refers to above.

Dialectics, for Adorno, cannot be reified into a method, or a dogmatic response to the world. Adorno's dialectical experience takes its leave from Hegel in a

certain distance from the concept of Aufhebung; the joint preservation and overcoming of contradiction in a more reconciled reality which will eventually resolve itself in an absolute truth that will be the identity of subject and object. Nevertheless, even in the extreme idealist moments of Hegel's philosophy, Adorno reads the hope that thought and reality can enter into a different relationship, a relationship that can only be different in relation to real changes in social reality. Adorno does not think that there can be an appropriation of experience as either authoritative or as an experience of grasping the whole in terms of the historical nature of existence itself, but only, both an interpretation and a construction based upon a dialectical experience that is immanent to the reality of a thought conditioned by society. In this sense, dialectics as the awareness of the non-identity of subject and object is the experience of social reality; "dialectical contradiction is experienced in the experience of society".[35]

For Adorno, the "central nerve" of the dialectic is the process of determinate negation, thus the experience of dialectics is fundamentally one of negativity. Determinate negation as a methodology concerns a re-orientation of philosophical analysis towards particularity, a turning towards the object that doesn't rest with the object as it is constructed by the categories of the understanding in Kantian terms, but attempts to undo the damage done to the object by concepts. Adorno refers to the attempt to "unleash the force" of the object.[36] Determinate negation, for Adorno, is a form of phenomenology as surrender, an attempt to approach the object without preconceptions and without any reserve, but at the same time this "immersion" cannot occur as some form of ur-experience. As we will see in

Adorno's critique of Husserl, there is no return to the "things themselves" that doesn't presume some foundationalist stance. Therefore, the corollary of this immersion in the object is that something in theory, or in the concept, or the forming of concepts must await a new apprehension of the object. Determinate negation is thus still a positing for Adorno, as it must work through concepts to move beyond what the concept identifies, and it can do this through an awareness of how every particular is mediated and is more than it is in terms of its presentation as object. However, this transcendence of the object does not take the place of a higher form of unity or identity of subject and object, but a deepening of the contradiction between subject and object, a deepening of the moment of non-identity. The difference between Hegel and Adorno's positing of determinate negation is in the construction of a whole which is absolute rather than negative. Adorno reverses Hegel's dictum that the whole is the true to assert that the construction of the whole is the untrue:

> "By specifying, in opposition to Hegel, the negativity of the whole, philosophy satisfies, for the last time, the postulate of determinate negation ..."[37]

This position has several consequences for an attempt to understand Adorno's concept of experience. Adorno characterises Hegel's position between rationalism and empiricism as one which aims to move beyond rigid definitions, and holds to the task of interpreting "spirit" in its experiences of the world, and constructing an

experience through that interpretation of spirit as a movement. This dual process of interpretation and construction as both processes of determinate negation that occur in relation to experience in the world raises a number of questions. First, is interpretation an understanding of some meaning in the world that has been lost, or the unmasking of more fundamental aspects of human relating to the world ? I have tried to argue in the previous chapter that there is not a fundamental concept of life that Adorno wants to articulate in terms of foundational faculties of the understanding, or an animal embodiment which can serve as some form of a re-enchantment of nature. This raises the question of the basis for the intellectual and aesthetic experience described in Adorno's process of open interpretation. His characterisation of interpretation as a surrendering or immersion in objectivity has a certain experiential grounding , which is not always clear, but needs to be elucidated. The elucidation of the ground for such an experience rests in an account of an experience (Erfahrung), which is fundamentally put into question by the particular destruction of tradition in modernity. Therefore, although Adorno's philosophical account of an experience of thinking, through an analysis of the division between Kantian and Hegelian philosophy differs from Agamben's reading of such a history as a loss of experience, he shares with Agamben an account of the destruction of everyday experience in terms of the gradual colonisation of social life by forms of experience characterised as Erlebnis. Both thinkers accounts of such a destruction of experience are dependent upon Benjamin's definition of concepts of Erlebnis and Erfahrung, but both Agamben and Adorno interpret these concepts in terms of a decay of experience in a rather

unified and undialectical manner. This is important for Adorno, because without a concept of everyday experience as Erfahrung, there is not the subjective basis for the individual experience which can open itself to the speculative experience of the shudder as described in the previous chapter. Without a strong concept of individual existence, the liquidation of the 'I' in either aesthetic experience or intellectual experience will not be able to be recuperated. In order to understand this account of the decay of experience in relation to the concepts of Erlebnis and Erfahrung it is important to analyse the account that Benjamin gives of the decay of experience in modernity.

Erlebnis and Erfahrung

In his work on Baudelaire, Benjamin thematises the transition in modern experience through a differentiation between Erlebnis and Erfahrung.[38] It is worth considering the meaning of these terms as they developed in philosophical usage, before examining in detail Benjamin's account of the decay of experience.

Gadamer outlines the history of the term Erlebnis in his book, Truth and Method. He writes that as a noun the term first came to prominence in the 1870s, when it was used in biographical writing. Erlebnis, with its use of the prefix er-, added to the word for "living", lebnis, gives a deepening sense to the verb that follows it carrying the sense of a deepening of life, as Gadamer says the "immediacy with which something is grasped".[39] There is a clear link between the terminology of Erlebnis, which first enters concrete philosophical usage with

Dilthey, and the life philosophy that was examined in the previous chapters, which serves as a philosophical critique of scientific, positivist thought by privileging modes of experiencing which are in some sense deeper than the rational formulations of enlightenment thought. Dilthey attempted to articulate a form of experience that would literally revivify philosophy. He characterises previous philosophy of experience in the following manner:

> "There is no real blood flowing in the veins of the knowing subject fabricated by Locke, Hume and Kant, but rather the diluted lymph of reason as mere intellectual activity."[40]

Erlebnis can be characterised by three different elements. It refers to a form of experience that moves beyond subject and object differentiations, in the direction of a more primordial concept of experience as "lived experience" prior to subject and object distinction. This primordial concept of experience can be configured in epistemological terms, as it was largely by Husserl, in terms of an originary unity of intending consciousness and intended object, or as a form of embodied "being-in-the-world" which is foundational for all forms of cognition. Therefore, whilst Heidegger was hostile to the linguistic usage of the concept of Erlebnis, the account given of tool use as readiness-to-hand, and of a general "being-in-the-world" as a prepredicative form of existence, is one element of this concept of lived experience as somehow beneath all subject-object differentiation.[41]

The second form of Erlebnis is that experience, that either as revealed in terms of religious experience, or in terms of aesthetic or surrealist experience would move beyond everyday forms of temporality and continuities of chronological time and personal identity over time. There is a sense of this experience in Heidegger's account of an authentic appropriation of certain fundamental moods which open up the possibility of the experience of different forms of temporality as a projection into the future. One could also think of the Bergsonian concept of durée as an access to a different and deeper relation of lived experience. Benjamin was particularly hostile to this concept of Erlebnis in terms of its incarnation in the philosophies that encouraged a form of war experience as a heightening of the experience of life, as demonstrated in the early philosophies of Buber and Jünger.

However, despite this attempt to distance himself from a concept of Erlebnis as a transcendent experience of heightened life beyond the everyday, Benjamin was not averse to attempting to delineate forms of experience which might dissolve and explode traditional concepts of the continuities of experience and this ambivalence gives a certain dialectical tension to his account of the movement from Erfahrung to Erlebnis that is lacking in Adorno's and Agamben's appropriations of this account.

The final element of Erlebnis is its mode as a form of apprehending an originary unity or a transcendent experience. This mode has its extreme cognitive form in the transcendental epoché that is outlined in Husserlian phenomenology, a form of bracketing out of social, historical and personal constructs to achieve a presuppositionless attitude towards the appearing of phenomena. This bracketing out

is conceived as a tension between a regulative ideal of a certain experiential methodology and an actual practice of bracketing as lived experience. Adorno's hostility to the concept of Erlebnis is largely, but not exclusively, waged through an attack on this concept of a lived experience as a presuppositionless attitude towards the apprehension of subject-object relations. Adorno's critique of the concept of Erlebnis occurs in his metacritique of epistemology and is largely concerned with the problem of the given in philosophy, and, particularly how this is structured in phenomenology.[42] For him, Husserl's phenomenology rests on an immediacy and identity of intention and object, which thus reifies the given into a primordial experience which does not take into account the reality that every experience of consciousness is a mediated experience, mediated through the structure of subjectivity, and the structuring of that subject in history. The search for lived experience in the sense of an Erlebnis presupposes some reified notion of originary experience that can be put to one side and reflected upon:

> "The talk about reflection on lived experiences (erlebnisse), which signify thoughts directed to a univocal contour, presupposes nothing less than the reification of the concept of givenness. It presupposes that the subject has a lived experience in itself upon which it may reflect."[43]

There can be no talk about a lived experience that lies in wait in consciousness for reflection, as the very process of experience involves a reflexive moment in the moment of perception. There is no Erlebnis, which is the ideal moment of the

identity of intending consciousness and given material. The whole process is mediated from the first. Thus, phenomenology creates its own problems through the inability to recognise the fundamentally dialectical nature of human experience. The concept of Erlebnis as either originary unity of intentional consciousness with its correlative object of intention, or as the transcendental epoché on the other hand, are both attempts to delineate a purity of perception that are doomed to failure. There can be no separation of subject and object, or a positing of an originary embodied subject-object that is somehow prior or transcendent to these structures of thought and existence.

Agamben's account of Erlebnis initially appears to share Adorno's critique of an experience that is in search of a chimera; "pre-conceptual immediacy".[44] The concept of Erlebnis locates itself in that no-mans land between the Kantian transcendental 'I' and the empirical 'I', and finds itself without any recourse for expression, other than through a reversion to poetry or mysticism. However, Agamben turns away from a dialectical turn at this point, and rather than drawing the Hegelian conclusion that everything is mediated, and thus that the search for an immediacy without conceptual determination is a fruitless search, he argues that it is the attempt to express this "muteness" of experience that is the problem, rather than the experience itself.[45] His critique results in the posing of a transcendental question as to the possibility of an experience, which in a sense is Erlebnis to its utmost degree, as "mute experience":

"A theory of experience truly intended to posit the problem of origin in a

radical way would then have to start beyond this "first expression" with experience as "still mute to speak" – that is, it would have to ask: does a mute experience exist, does an *infancy (in-fancy)* of experience exist ? And, if it does, what is its relationship to language."[46]

This infancy of experience is the return to a form of life, as that place that is before or between any form of determination and expression, but in some way, can serve as a starting point or seed for a new form of experience. The problem is that it is impossible to see how such an originary experience could be anything other than an extreme reduction of experience, and a reduction of experience that is analogous to the reduction of experience characterised as bare life. The confusion in Agamben's account is therefore between an account of bare life as this empty space for domination produced in the context of power, and a similar account of an empty space of indifferentiation either as the experience of the gap between muteness and language, or the originary space of potentiality as an ontological move which can give some meaning to the concept of experience.

Erfahrung is primarily differentiated from Erlebnis by its relation to history and tradition. Erfahrung is the experience that is acquired through "memory and expectation".[47] Experience, in these terms, is thoroughly mediated by its context and the forms of its transmission. It is also an undergoing, a process of acquiring knowledge that is transmitted through passive reception rather than scientific experimentation. Experience is not about constant confirmation but about the assimilation of thwarted expectations. Experience in this sense, then, is not

something that stands outside of life, but is integrated into the life of communities through memory, tradition and shared culture. The key components of Erfahrung are an authority to the experience that is transmitted, a culture that is able to communicate that experience, and a culture within which that experience can be shared, remembered and transmitted. This is the sense of experience in Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller".

Erfahrung also has a more limited sense as the description of the cognitive experience involved in judgement and knowledge. The process in empiricism, whereby a unified subject orders and classifies the raw data of experience is a process that can be termed experience as a whole. This experience, then, is the process whereby an inert objectivity is synthesised by a subject and raw sensations are formed into the object of experience. In some sense, experience is configured here as a junior partner to the understanding, in that, in the Kantian sense there is no knowledge without experience, but experience without the synthesising operations of subjective judgement, could not be termed experience at all. It was in response to this narrowed concept of experience as a form of cognitive subsumption, that the concept of Erlebnis arose in German philosophy in the late 19th century. Some of the problems in the opposition of Erfahrung to Erlebnis and some of the different modes in which these two words have been used stems from this opposition which bypasses the fuller social content of experience. Because Erlebnis was configured in response to the desiccated and ahistorical experience of empiricism, it tends in its simple positing of a fullness of life, or a prepredicative lived experience, to reinstate the problem of the separation

of form and content instituted by empiricism but at a deeper level. The problem of empiricism is the epistemological problem of how a form-giving subject can assimilate the wild and raw sense data into objects of knowledge, which can then be said to coincide in some sense with objects as they are. How does the empty form of the subject encompass the content of matter in universal subsumptive structures that do not dissolve the particularity of sense data in illegitimate universals ? This is the problematic relation of form and matter as debated within empiricism. The opposition of a concept of Erlebnis to such a positivist sense of forming matter into concepts or objects of knowledge is still consumed with an attempt to construct an ahistorical, core structure to experience, to which all content must relate. This core structure or unity is configured in phenomenology as beyond subject and object differentiation, but it still absorbs all particularity in an empty concept of "life" or of unity of intentionality and given object. There is a symmetry between the two concepts, because the relation of both concepts to Erfahrung as historical experience is not thought.

The problem, for Benjamin, in this relationship between Erfahrung and Erlebnis is the place of tradition in modernity. It is the distinctive mode of experience within modernity that it has lost its relation to tradition. Benjamin argues that the increasing technological sophistication of society has produced forms of communication which have atrophied the possibility of experience, in the sense of Erfahrung. The replacement of narration by information has atrophied the possibility of authority in the tradition of communicable experience. Alongside this are the increasing shocks, both on an everyday basis and on a larger basis in

modern society which do not enable the individual to assimilate experiences in modern society. In "The Storyteller", Benjamin refers to soldiers returning from the First World War, without the possibility of communicating their experience.[48] In the essay on Baudelaire, he refers to the everyday shocks of modern city living which preclude the individual from assimilating experience. Using Freud's essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", Benjamin cites the necessity for the human organism to be constantly alert to the parrying of shocks to its perceptual system. The greater the shocks are in the perceptual system, the more human consciousness becomes an alert system which parries the shocks that are surrounding it, and the less do these impressions enter into the perceptual apparatus and become lasting experiences:

> "The greater the share of the shock factor in particular impressions the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli: the more efficiently it is so, the less do these impressions enter experience (Erfahrung) tending to remain in the sphere of a certain hour in one's life (Erlebnis)."[49]

Agamben writing in the early 1990s repeats these formulations in the opening pages of his history of the destruction of experience. Thus, he begins his essay in a consciously Benjaminian manner by writing:

> "The question of experience can be approached nowadays only with an acknowledgement that it is no longer accessible to us ... his incapacity to

have and communicate experiences is perhaps one of the few self-certainties to which he can lay claim."[50]

What Benjamin argues in the essay on Baudelaire, and in the "Storyteller" essay is that with the onset of modernity and, particularly, with the First World War, there was what John McCole terms an "epochal upheaval in the human sensorium".[51] It is this change in experience that he equates with Erlebnis, in the sense that with the constant shocks of city life, the human perceptual organism is unable to assimilate sensations and form a stock of experience. There is a correspondence between the shock experience of everyday city life, the worker's experience at the machine and the bombardment of information that replaces the processes of narration. All of these shocks combine to atrophy modern experience.

However, it would be a mistake to accept Benjamin's too straightforward distinction between Erlebnis and Erfahrung, and to configure his account purely as the transformation of Erfahrung into Erlebnis in modernity. Benjamin's account is far more an account of the destruction of Erfahrung, which leaves the question of the possibility of a new, third form of experience open. Erfahrung is destroyed because the process of the communicability of tradition is fundamentally altered in modernity. There does seem to be a certain reduction of the concept of Erlebnis at work here. Relating Erlebnis purely to the moment of perception, reduces that sense of an experience that escapes the bonds of tradition, and somehow escapes the bonds of conceptual determination. Of course, Erlebnis in the sense that Benjamin gives it, does escape the bounds of a conceptual determination, but

purely through its complete lack of assimilation as experience by a subject. As experience, Erlebnis is reduced from that form of experience which stands out as a more alive and lived experience from the everyday, to a form of experience that is not an experience, because it is analogous to just a series of jolts. Elsewhere, for example in the essay on "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproduction", Benjamin will gesture towards a new concept of experience, an experience that takes as its model the reception of film.[52] In this experience, the subject does not appropriate and form experience, or have a lived experience which can stand outside the everyday, but passively assimilates an experience which decentres and desubjectifies as experience. The experience of certain techniques in film, such as montage, produces forms of passive experience that aesthetically mirror the shocks of everyday life, but enable the viewer to observe these effects and produces a communal, passive and surface experience that desubjectifies and provides the glimpse of a different form of experience. This desubjectification of experience is similar to the account that Adorno gives in his experience of the aesthetic shudder. The crucial difference, though, is that Adorno's account of aesthetic experience as a subjective experience against the 'I' depends on a strong ego for the immersion in objectivity to be an immersion that opens but does not liquidate the subject. Benjamin talks about the experience of film in the context of a collective lack of communal Erfahrung, which opens up the possibility that the new form of experience could just passively order the experience of a mass consumption, as a passive assimilation of reified experience. The liquidation of subjectivity in the reception of film cannot be recuperated in

terms of a subjective experience, because it has no experience as Erfahrung to rely on, and therefore can just be open to the manipulation of false needs and false desires of the culture industry. In a narcissistic form, this experience falls in love with its helplessness, whereas the experience of the shudder registers a protest against the rigidity of the ego and a glimpse of a life without self-preservation, which is a move beyond the state of passivity and helplessness.

The Destruction of Experience

The common argument shared by Adorno, Agamben and Benjamin regarding the destruction of experience in modernity is that experience as a communal form of authoritative experience begins to wither with the First World War. The experience that has decayed is an experience that is communal and rooted in a certain physical response to the world, that is not dissimilar to the account of the relation between life and experience that we saw John Dewey give earlier with regards to what it means to have a fulfilled experience.

Adorno shares the assessment of the place of the subject in modernity as the loss of a place, configured in terms of the loss of experience, and is indebted in his account to Benjamin's account of the process of the destruction of experience through the technologies of modernity, and particularly through the relation of an identifying subject towards an object that is imposed through modes of capitalist production and consumption, as he argues in the following passage from Minima Moralia:

"Not least to blame for the withering of experience is the fact that things, under the law of pure functionality, assume a form that limits contact with them to mere operation, and tolerates no surplus either in freedom of conduct or in autonomy which would survive as the core of experience because it is not consumed by the moment of action."[53]

A certain relation between subjects and objects encapsulated by factory production and other mass forms of repetitive experience, alongside a culture industry that colonises the free time of the worker in relation to a standardised culture of consumption, has caused the marrow to be sucked from experience.[54] This destruction of experience realises its apotheosis in the forms of bare life that are revealed as death-in-life in Auschwitz and that Agamben develops as different empty spaces within the context of modern biopower. This negative teleology of a history of experience should be both constructed and denied in terms of Adorno's statement in Negative Dialectics. However, it is only Benjamin who attempts to grapple with the potentially liberating possibilities of this destruction of tradition, although the problem for Benjamin is that he does this through a certain experience of a redemptive whole, that although it takes place through history, is fundamentally ahistorical as completion of history. I will consider this in further detail in the next chapter in relation to the concept of dialectical images. However, at this juncture, it is important to note that the destruction of experience

becomes an undifferentiated and unhistorical notion, particularly in Agamben's use of this account.

Adorno attempts a more subtle account of the destruction of a certain experience of a tradition in his acknowledgement that tradition dominates and restricts as much as it enables the opening up towards the world. The process of tradition is just as much about entrenching certain possibilities and certain attitudes within humanity as it is about enabling the possibility of experiencing something new. Adorno's response to the question of tradition is therefore suitably dialectical. On the one hand, tradition has been handed down by the victors in history and communicated by attempting to ignore the traces of suffering that are almost expunged in the process of the transmission of tradition. Nevertheless, without some context, some place to locate an experience, there can be no experience. Therefore, Adorno concludes his essay on tradition with a characteristic paradox:

> "Whoever seeks to avoid betraying the bliss which tradition still promises in some of its images and the possibilities buried beneath its ruins must abandon the tradition which turns possibilities and meanings into lies. Only that which inexorably denies tradition may once again retrieve it."[55]

The possibilities that open themselves up in the decay of experience are twofold; first, a new awareness of the beauty of the old forms of experience comes to light in the decay of experience itself, and, second, there is the possibility that new

forms of experience will arise that can separate themselves from the debilitating aspects of tradition. Nevertheless, Adorno's predominant mode when discussing experience in modernity is through an account of it as a withering or a decay, and this account is fairly undifferentiated culturally. There is no attempt to look at the differences between different cultures in the assimilation of modernity and accelerated change. This is important for Adorno, because his concepts of intellectual experience and aesthetic experience, depend upon the formation of a subjective experience which can allow the dissolution of subjectivity within certain experiences entailing a metaphysical experience of the possibility of something other, without liquidating the individual as a locus point for a critical subjectivity. In a certain sense, the dissolution of Erfahrung into Erlebnis is less of a problem for Benjamin as the movement beyond the reified whole of a destroyed experience is configured in both redemptive and revolutionary modes as a collective experience, either the collective experience of an unconscious which preserves traces of a destroyed tradition, or a revolutionary project that embraces the destructive character of such a process within modernity and intensifies it to a point of liberation. As we will see, Adorno is hostile to both of these approaches.

Agamben's account of the decay of experience, although written some forty to sixty years on from Benjamin and Adorno's accounts does not move the account any further in relation to an understanding of this as historical process. He proceeds as though the inter-war diagnosis of a decay of experience can still hold for the last years of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century. In The Idea of Prose, he makes the startling claim that there has been

nothing written since that period about the decay of experience that takes the problematic any further forwards.[56] He writes from the assumed position of a completed destruction of experience, and moves between the assumption of such a place in terms of what it could mean in concrete living situations, such as his accounts of life in the camps and bare life in the modernity of biopolitics, and then crosses to a position that welcomes this destruction of experience as a restoration of our fundamental emptiness as a non-relating relation to Being, the "Being-expropriated is the human being".[57] This oscillation doesn't give any content to an account of what forms a critical project or a critical subjectivity could take in terms of this completed destruction of experience.

There is little attention as to when this period of crisis will end, or whether it can even still be called a crisis if it has lasted for almost a century. Martin Jay concludes his earlier cited essay with the statement that we are still living the crisis of experience:

> "... it will only be when the crisis itself ends and a deadly calm settles over the world that the perilous journey that is experience will no longer be a human possibility."[58]

This equation of experience, crisis and a journey seems to put into question what any of the individual terms can mean any more. How can there be a crisis of experience, if experience itself is defined as a crisis ? There needs to be a more delineated and detailed account of the different forms that experience takes in

everyday life, for this account of destruction not to be hypostasised as an interminable crisis, and a crisis that has lost its historical specificity. The specificity of the crisis of experience inaugurated by the First World War was the transition from a form of experience which was not marked by speed of travel, accelerated technological change, and mass technologised slaughter. The incommensurability of experience was due to the polarity of a before and after, an experience of communal, traditional experience being suddenly and irrevocably altered. To continue to invoke this account unhistorically, when this polarity of experience is no longer lived seems to ignore how the relation between Erfahrung and Erlebnis is constructed in the different geographical spaces of late modernity. There is a tendency to elevate a certain conception of communal or traditional experience in an undifferentiated manner and then to map its decay or destruction. This is not to deny the elements within Benjamin's account of a particular accelerated and rapid form of change within modern societies which destroys the process of tradition as it was previously understood. What is needed is a historical account of experience as Erfahrung that accepts that the particular transmission of a tradition as both a destruction and a preservation has been destroyed, but that this does not eradicate completely possibilities of communal and subjective experience. The problem for Adorno will be that in his acceptance of this undifferentiated account of the decay of experience, he loses the concept of a subject within a tradition that he relies on for his account of metaphysical experience.

Chapter 6: Negative Dialectic as Self-Reflection

In this chapter, I will examine Adorno's account of dialectical experience as it is outlined primarily in his studies on Hegel and in Negative Dialectics, and argue that his new conception of dialectics is fundamentally a speculative dialectics. The convergence with the normative readings of Adorno that I examined earlier in chapter four, is that this speculation revolves around the question of life; social life and natural life, and their mediation. However, the relation between dialectics, experience and life cannot be given any concrete content in the terms of either an enhanced rationality or a sensuous materiality; it is fundamentally speculative. The concept of speculation is altered in Adorno's philosophy, but it retains an element of its use in Kantian philosophy as a thinking which is at the limits of possible experience, and in Hegelian philosophy as a speculative experience produced by the reflection on dialectical contradiction. The concept of speculation in the discourse of everyday language is also involved to a certain extent, as Adorno's attempt is to formulate an experience which is not fulfilled, that has an affinity with the idea of wishing or hoping.[1] What I will emphasise in this chapter is that Adorno's concept of speculation is closely tied to a practice of self-reflection which reveals the possibility of a different relation between subject and object. The concept of speculation is tied to Adorno's concept of possibility, of which I will give a fuller account in the next chapter. However, here it will be necessary to outline how a practice or process of self-reflection, which is tied to a reflection

on objectivity, and what objectivity means for the subject, can reveal the necessary grounding for the possibility of such a speculative experience. If this sounds like a transcendental idea, then it is not meant to, as the reflection does not reveal an empty subjectivity, in terms of transcendental ego, thought in either Kantian or Husserlian terms, or the empty subject of desire in terms of Hegel's philosophy. The process of self-reflection reveals both the subject's reliance on a material basis, which is thought in terms of need and drive, and the separation from such a material basis in the very act of reflection. The result of a process of self-reflection will be a subject conceived as embodied thought reliant on a constitutive but aconceptual object, that cannot be hypostasised as either "volitively bridgeable or an ontological ultimate".[2] The speculative experience is tied to a different possibility of being human, of living life in a way which would not mean a radical split between a human ego and nature, although importantly, it is not configured as a fulfilled or completed reconciliation of subject and object in experience. The dialectic of self-consciousness, a dialectic that Hegel terms experience in the introduction to the Phenomenology of Spirit, is the means to gain an insight into both a separateness and an intrinsic relatedness to the natural moment within all human reason and will. Adorno refers to a form of immanent transcendence, as "... what transcends nature is nature itself".[3] However, this process of self-reflection as dialectical experience that reveals a life that is still living beyond the grasp of the identifying subject cannot be invoked itself as enhanced rationality, or critical method. To do so, would be to place the negative experience of dialectics as a positive system of enhanced rationality, to postulate a

reconciliation that does not exist in reality. Therefore this self-reflection as experience calls for a further critique itself, a form of reflection on reflection.

This introduction outlines the themes of this chapter. I will begin with a reconstruction of Hegel's account of self-consciousness, and an attempt to map on to that account Adorno's appropriation and reconstruction of this experience. Adorno's conception of dialectical experience will be further outlined through a reading of his essays on Hegel, and his account of a dialectic of construction, interpretation and expression. Adorno's concept of mediation will be considered and defended against a recent critique of it given by Brian O`Connor.[4] The second part of the chapter will explore Adorno's materialism, his attempt to outline a concept of the subject as embodied, as a thinking responding to bodily impulses and needs. It is at this point that Adorno comes closest to needing a fundamental ontology, and his description of the body and the place of the body in rationality is certainly figurative rather than thought through in detail. However, in relation to what the verb "to live" means in terms of a life that does not live, Adorno attempts at least to give a material understanding, a material understanding that is absent in Agamben's attempt to recuperate a concept of a form of life in which a bare life cannot be isolated. This discussion about the possibility of living, will then be considered more fully in the next chapter.

The Experience of Philosophical Reflection

The initial stage of consciousness, as described in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit is a simultaneous distinguishing of a subject from an object, and at the same time a relating to that object. There is something for consciousness, an object, only through this initial dual process of separation and relation.[5] Adorno gives an account of this in terms of a philosophical anthropology in Dialectic of Enlightenment, an account that we have considered in chapter three. To recapitulate here, the process of separation and relation is resolved in capitalist society through a relation that is a postulated subject- object identification. This is what Adorno terms domination. Why is this domination ?

The reason is because when we reflect upon the object as it is for consciousness, what we come to realise is that this is not a relation to the object as it is in itself, but an object as it is for us. The process of separating and relating to the object is not a mirroring of finite objects as they are in themselves, but the product of the synthesising activity of the mind producing its own objects for itself. The object in itself disappears from view, and the postulation of the object for consciousness as that which is to be identified excludes the natural completely.

This is the position within which Kant attempts to build a bridge between an empirical realm, where the objects as synthesised by the understanding can be within the bounds of reason and a transcendental realm where the thing in itself can only be thought not known. Speculative reason is an attempt to think the thing-in-itself, an attempt to think that which is beyond all possible experience. Kant's grounding of the possibility of experience lies in an acceptance that an

experience can only be the experience of the object that is synthesised by the unity of consciousness through the categories of the understanding. There is no possibility of moving beyond the gap between the thing in itself and the thing as it is for consciousness.

For Hegel, experience starts with this contradiction:

> "... this dialectical movement which consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge and its object, is precisely what is called experience."[6]

Experience here is conceived as a process, rather than a realm, and this is the fundamental importance of this description of experience for Adorno, the possibility that an experience will develop historically and socially, and that the speculative will not be pushed beyond the bounds of a possible experience. The process of reflection results in the contradiction that knowledge does not correspond with its object. The process of experience as a journey is the attempt to resolve such a contradiction, which will have a historical form. Rather than a resolution of the contradiction through a delimitation of the legitimate use of reason, Hegel's concept of experience is conceived initially as a task, and, thus as the possibility of a reconciliation. Adorno's critique of Hegel is that his resolution of such a contradiction through a progress to an Absolute knowledge, in terms of a subject-object identity, does nothing to preserve the dignity of the particular. The thing-in-itself as object of knowledge is just subsumed into an all-embracing subjectivity.

What Kant and Hegel share, for Adorno, is a failure to account for the self of such a self-reflection. The self is conceived as an empty transcendental ego for Kant which is just the "I think" that accompanies all representations, but can have no other content or even an inner content. There can be no experience of the self, as it is beyond the spatial and temporal forms of intuition, and thus beyond all possible experience. This causes Kant all sorts of difficulties, in both his critical and his moral philosophy. However, what it is important to note here is the formal emptiness of the transcendental subject. It is the synthesising ground of experience, that cannot be experienced. In Hegel, thought is replete with determinations and content, but still exists as a fundamental emptiness in terms of its immersion in the external world. The subject of desire is full of a content but separate from that content in the sense that it projects itself outwards onto the natural world. Consciousness becomes replete with meaning through the process of finding itself and gaining recognition in the world and by other consciousnesses. The dialectical contradictions and failures of recognition determine the progress of experience as it moves through different stages in the Phenomenology of Spirit. The process of self-consciousness is the location of itself in the world, the "identity of itself with itself".[7] What becomes lost in this characterisation of self-consciousness as desire is the ineliminable moment of nature within the subject itself, the body of the subject. For Adorno, self-reflection will ultimately be a reflection on the natural within the subject, and therefore, the subject cannot be configured as an empty law-giver for the natural (Kant) or a projection of empty desire for recognition (the Hegel of the Phenomenology of Spirit).

Adorno wants to retain the Hegelian account of an experience of consciousness that moves beyond itself through the experience of its own contradictions. The process of this movement will be his appropriation of a concept of mediation from Hegel and Marx. Despite the Kantian ban on experiencing the noumenon, this concept retains for Adorno a certain dignity as the horizon of something that is always both within and beyond the subject. Adornian self-reflection is a process in which the "self observes: I myself am part of nature".[8] This reflective process is still a separation, but what Adorno refuses to do is to make this radical cut between subjectivity and nature. The process of self-reflection is the process of a "nature that has become conscious of itself".[9] Nevertheless, this process of self-reflection as nature becoming aware of itself, is still a process of separation. Adorno is not arguing for some form of intuition of the natural within the human, or an appropriation of the becoming natural within the human. What he is attempting to think is human nature as a relation between subject and object that doesn't suppress the bodily element of subjectivity. In the very process of self-reflection, we recognise ourselves as separate from nature through a capacity for reflection.

This process of a nature becoming conscious of itself as nature is speculative because the natural within the human has been denied in favour of a drive for self-preservation. Adorno adopts the Freudian account of a renunciation of instincts in favour of a civilised society, but then poses the question as to whether such a renunciation was worth the effort:

"In social terms, the compensation promised by civilisation and by our education in return for our acts of renunciation is not forthcoming".[10]

But, this renunciation cannot be wished away. Any attempt to understand what it means to live in a different sense will have to occur through a reflection on the contradictions inherent in contemporary experience. The process of self-reflection is therefore a mediated process and it is important to understand what Adorno means by mediation.

Mediation

In his essay, "The concept of Mediation in Hegel and Adorno", Brian O'Connor criticises Adorno's concept of mediation on a number of grounds.[11] It will be useful as an introduction to Adorno's concept of mediation to outline this critique, as what O'Connor misses in Adorno, namely the dialectic of contradiction, is an important element for his use of the Hegelian concept of mediation.

O`Connor states that Adorno attempts to use the concept of mediation to solve two separate problems, first the subject-object problem, and second to outline a certain claim about conceptuality:

"It seems to me that mediation (in the sense that Adorno uses the term) conflates, rather than synthesizes, two very different claims: first, a materialist claim about the priority of non-conceptuality and second, an idealist claim about

the conceptual nature of experience. The result is that we find two competing strands of thought which ultimately prevent Adorno from resolving what he sees as the various problems of representationalism."[12]

This quotation demonstrates Adorno's concept of mediation in a negative way, as we can construct Adorno's concept through opposition to this critique. Adorno is not interested in a synthesis, in terms of a sublation of contradiction in Hegelian terms. Nevertheless, he is very interested in the concept of contradiction, and his use of mediations normally serves the purpose of expressing certain fundamental contradictions. Therefore, where O`Connor reads a lack of synthesis, there lies contradiction. My response to such a critique would be that Adorno is not interested in resolution or solution, but is interested in the deepening of certain fundamental contradictions, a deepening which takes place through a process of mediation. This process does lie in the first process that O`Connor outlines, the account of mediation through the priority of the object, and this is a twofold form of mediation, in that it reflects on the relation between subject and object in terms of its social and natural history. However, I don't think Adorno claims that experience is conceptual alone, rather dialectics affords the experience of a dichotomy between our forms of conceptuality and what is not expressed by these forms, the residue of conceptuality.

Adorno's account of subject and object mediation rests on an understanding of the mutual dependence of subject and object. There can be no subject without an object as the something to be thought. Therefore, "What is known through

consciousness must be a something".[13] But, there is a further element in this mediation of subjectivity by objectivity, in that the knowing subject itself must be conceived in terms of its embodiment:

> "If subject is not something, and 'something' designates an irreducibly objective element, then it is nothing at all; even as *actus purus* it needs to refer to something that acts."[14]

This is the ineliminable material moment that Adorno asserts in opposition to the empty subject of Kant or Hegel. The priority of the object lies in the fact that an object can be conceived of without subject, whereas a subject without an object cannot be conceived. O'Connor reads the mediation of the object as an internal mediation, a mediation "according to its own concept", as he quotes Adorno.[15] If the object is mediated according to its own concept, then mediation does not become a relation between subject and object, but can be a process of subject and object mediation which can exist without reference to one another. The problem is that Adorno does not have a concept of the object that is mediated according to its own concept, as if you read the full quotation, the sentence can be read in two ways:

> "Object is also mediated; but, according to its own concept, it is not so thoroughly dependent upon subject as subject is dependent upon objectivity".[16]

This sentence could be read in the way that O'Connor reads it, but the comma, after the 'but', inclines a reading that means that the concept of objectivity can be conceived independently of subjectivity, rather than that there is a process of mediation internal to the object that doesn't involve subjectivity. Mediation is always a mediation of subject and object, but the object is not as dependent upon a subject as vice versa, as it is logically possible to conceive of an object without a subject, but the opposite is not true. This is, perhaps, a tendentious argument. One is inclined to respond that it is perfectly possible to imagine a bodiless subject, but Adorno will attempt to push this point, that there must some element of the objective within the subject. Any conception of a transcendental ego is reliant on an empirical ego, but what is purged through the move from empirical to transcendental is the reliance on the body, and it is this purging that Adorno reads again and again in the postulation of an empty subject of reason. This reading is supported on the next page when Adorno writes that:

> "The primacy of the object can be discussed legitimately only when that primacy - over the subject in the broadest sense of the term - is somehow determinable, that is, more than the Kantian thing-in-itself, as the unknown cause of phenomenal appearance."[17]

The object must matter materially for the subject in some way. The object enters into mediations with subjectivity and can only be understood as such, but there is always something beyond in terms of the object, something that is non-identical to

the concepts that wish to identify them. The same is true of the subject, but what is beyond the subject is its own objectivity, its bodily needs, instincts and desires which have been suppressed by the renunciation of instincts in favour of the drive for self-preservation. This is the priority of the object, in its mediation between subject and object, as a mediation both within subjectivity and external to subjectivity. This is still a relation, not a mediation internal to the concept of object itself. Adorno, contra Hegel, does not have a purely conceptual concept of mediation which does not refer to the nonconceptual. The difficulty and the speculative experience of Adorno's materialism is to account for such an ineliminable moment of nature within the subject.

O'Connor's second claim as to Adorno's account of mediation is the claim that he is an idealist, that mediation refers to a linking of one concept to the next, in that all concepts are insufficient and call for further concepts. The idea of a constellation is that no single concept is sufficient to express the meaning of a particular and therefore further related concepts are called for. O'Connor reads this as a "conceptual coherentism", in the sense that truth resides in a constellation of concepts, and, thus this idea of mediation does not correlate with the materialist thesis of the priority of the object in subject-object mediation. What O'Connor misses is that Adorno's attempt through constellations is to deepen a certain contradiction between concepts and objects. Concepts cannot completely identify objects, and neither can constellations of concepts. The construction of a constellation is an attempt to orient a shift in the rigid relation of subject and object, as identifying relation, in a different direction or register. Constellations are

an attempt to construct a different relation which would reveal a new possibility of the meaning of objectivity, as Adorno states, "cognition of the object in its constellation is cognition of the process stored in the object".[18] The constellation of concepts results from the awareness of the contradiction between concept and object, and is a twofold process of attempting to destabilise the identifying rigidity of the single concept, and therefore to unlock its relations to other concepts and other mediations, often its social and historical conditions which are being suppressed, and the attempt to express the meaning of the object, in a process of interpretation without intention, without presupposition.

Through this critique, I have outlined Adorno's central concept of mediation as related to subject-object mediation, but this is a mediation that involves a dialectic in the form of contradiction. What mediation reveals are different levels of contradiction between subject and object, but this contradiction cannot be resolved purely philosophically, as it results from real contradictions within society. One of the key forms that mediation will take in Adorno will be the reflection on the social and historical form and meaning of both subjects and objects. The process of a negative dialectics as self-reflection is the awareness of contradiction as contradiction, and the speculative moment within such an experience is the possibility of different forms of relating between subject and object which would allow the "communication of what is differentiated".[19] As what is differentiated cannot be communicated through conceptual categories which do not allow for the communication of the differentiated, a philosophy which attempts such a communication is caught within the trap of attempting to say the unsayable.

However, through an experience of possibility at the limits of the possible, an experience, which will always be responsive to a material residue within the subject, the concept of a speculative philosophy can survive as experience, as an experience of life.

Adorno will depart from Hegel in the characterisation of such a process as a closed totality which has a necessary progress. For Adorno, this is the problem of idealism in its ultimate dominance of objectivity, that it postulates an identity of subject and object beneath, above and beyond all processes of mediation. Therefore, the hallmark of Adorno`s dialectic, rather than that of necessity, will be "fragility":

> "Hegelian dialectic finds its ultimate truth, that of its own impossibility, in its unresolved and vulnerable quality, even if as the theodicy of self-consciousness, it has no awareness of this."[20]

Adorno's formulations about objectivity have the nature of speculation about them, in the ordinary sense of the term, of groping for something beyond formulation concretely. He recognises this himself:

> "Hegel is able to think from the thing itself out, to surrender passively, as it were, to its authentic substance, only because by virtue of the system the matter at hand is referred to its identity with the absolute subject."[21]

Nevertheless, Adorno wants his dialectical philosophy to express the life of things through a turn to the object. Adorno's materialist metaphysics consists in the fact that the object of speculation is material; life itself. However, life is itself mediated in a twofold manner, being both social and natural, and it is to this speculation about social life and natural life that I will now turn.

Total Social Process: The Prince and the Frog

The role of a concept of labour in Adorno's work is perplexing. On the one hand, the concept has an orthodox Marxist centrality, in the sense that the beginning of the dialectic and the motor of the dialectic for Adorno is the origin of society and conceptual thought in the social production of labour. He agrees with Marx's critique of the spiritualising of material relations in Hegel's concept of Geist. Although the immanence of Geist, and its production through history is approved by Marx, the reliance on a concept of reason as identity above and beneath the movement of history that has no relation to the social labour embedded in objects is the fundamental flaw of the Hegelian dialectic. For Adorno, the essence of objects can, therefore, be understood in terms of the social relations of labour embedded in them:

> " ... society is manifested in phenomena the way for Hegel, essence is manifested in them. Society is essentially concept, just as spirit is ... "[22]

However, this originary notion of social labour cannot be hypostasised in itself. Labour and the social relies upon a certain relation to nature, a relation to nature that Marx himself drew attention to. Adorno writes that:

> "When Marx, in his critique of the Gotha Platform, told the Lassalleans that in contrast to the customary litany of popular socialists labour was not the sole source of social wealth, he was philosophically ... saying no less than that labour could not be hypostasised ... Such hypostasis merely extends the illusion of the predominance of the productive principle. It comes to be true only in relation to that nonidentical moment which Marx in his disdain for epistemology called first by the crude, too narrow name of "nature", later on by that of "natural material", and by other less incriminated terms."[23]

Thus, there is a twofold understanding of the relations of social labour within Marx's writing. First, there is the argument as to the intrinsic, one might say ontological, mediation of humanity and nature through social labour that is outlined in the early writings, and in The German Ideology.[24] This is what Adorno terms the moment of nature in Marx's work, and it is not something that is posited as such, but developed as something that always escapes the bounds of a capitalist society. Adorno will refer to this in different terms as nature, as the somatic, as the non-identical.[25] This will be the focus of one aspect of Adorno's speculative dialectical philosophy in terms of the experience of the object. However, the other concept is a purely immanent concept of the social relations of labour embedded

in objects within capitalist society. This is as equally important an aspect of what Adorno means by the preponderance of the object, and it is in this sense that his dialectics can be seen as a form of hermeneutics, an interpretation of objects in terms of the social meanings embedded them, and a reading of that social meaning in terms of the conflict of the social relations of production within capitalism.[26] However, the second speculative process in Adorno is this attempt to experience the somatic, the natural, the non-identical, and this is the sense in which Adorno's relation to a concept of social labour becomes more ambiguous, because here the important thing for Adorno is the experience of something beyond any relation within labour, and therefore, it appears a move even beyond Marx's account of unalienated labour.

However, what I want to consider first, is the dialectical move to the subject-object relation as being a relation that can be read in terms of the social relations of labour encoded within it, because this is itself a problem of speculative reason for Adorno, as he must rely on a certain underlying meaning and unfolding of a historical process to construct these hermeneutic readings. Given his critique of absolute idealism, and his critique of the proletariat as the agent of historical change, on what can Adorno rely for the movement of his dialectical mediations?

In the famous correspondence from November to December of 1938 between Benjamin and Adorno concerning the methodology of a dialectical materialism, Benjamin locates the substantive issue as one of construction within the dialectic:

"... the problem is one of construction. I believe that speculation can start its

necessarily bold flight with some prospect of success only if, instead of putting on the waxen wings of the esoteric, it seeks its source of strength in construction alone."[27]

Benjamin's argument is in response to Adorno's well-known critique that the study of the Arcades project, and the study on Baudelaire in particular, stands at "a crossroads between magic and positivism", as Benjamin's immersion in the cultural and social artifacts of capitalist existence in 19th century France relates these superstructural elements too immediately to the base of capitalist economics. There is no process of mediation between the objects of study and the social elements that are embedded in them.[28] Adorno is not referring here to some orthodoxy of a dialectical mediation that Benjamin is departing from, as he states himself this problem of the construction of the dialectic is one that he is grappling with and has not resolved.[29] The shared methodology is that dialectical thought begins with everything discarded by Hegel; the particular, the transient, the fragmentary. It is through the immersion in objectivity that the subject is dissolved and can come to an experience of elements of the object which can escape the reification of a subsumptive, identity thinking. This experience of immersion is a form of surrender to the object by a subject that attempts to suspend its identifying proceedures through such a surrender. This initial attempt of an experience of immersion is presuppositionless in the sense that it aims to uncover the meanings inherent in the object itself through a passive assimilation rather than an aggressive identification. The experience of immersion has a strong affinity with aesthetic

experience, in this initial suspension and approach to the object as inherently meaningful. It also has a certain affinity with phenomenology in the sense of an attempt to approach the meaning of "things themselves", but as we have seen Adorno's phenomenological proceedure is more Hegelian than Husserlian, in that it refuses a transcendental subjectivity which performs an epoché, and instead relies on an initial dissolution of subjectivity into the meaning of the object itself.

The question of construction is how the subject emerges again, as a critical subject, beyond the experience of immersion. But, what is this experience of immersion? It is fundamentally reflective, for Adorno, an intellectual experience, but as we have described earlier an intellectual experience which opens itself to the object of interpretation. Another form of such an experience of immersion that has been described earlier, is the aesthetic 'shudder' which dissolves the ego in a subjective experience against the ego. Immersion is then a process of desubjectification that occurs through an intellectual experience that registers bodily. This is a point in Adorno's thought where the demand for coherence starts to seep in. How is this immersion coherent, when it contains such a range of confused categories ? The easy answer, and to an extent the correct answer, is that coherence is not the issue, as what is precisely produced through such an immersion in the object is the blurring and deepening of all of the contradictions that the demand for coherence wants to keep separate, distinctions such as subject and object, body and mind, and theory and practice. This still doesn't give us an account of the conditions for the practice of such an immersion in objectivity. One of the forms of such a practice rests on the constellation of concepts that attempt

to produce a different relation between subject and object, without a final identification of the object. Through a constellation, the subject is still ineliminably differentiated from object, in the use of conceptuality, but concepts are destabilised as pure identifications in their relation to other concepts, often in a relation of parataxis, contradictions being expressed as different clauses within one sentence. However, for this to matter materially, there must an elaboration of how this conceptual constellation affects the object, and Adorno attempts this through a concept of embodied thought. It is here that the coherence of such an immersion does break down at times, but we will consider both of these issues as we progress through this chapter.

In his essay, "The Prince and the Frog", one of the few places that Agamben deals directly with Adorno, he attempts to read the debate between Adorno and Benjamin in a reversal of its usual characterisation. If the usual way of characterising the debate is by Adorno calling Benjamin a "vulgar materialist", whose Marxism is conjured without mediation, Agamben's strategy is to invoke Benjamin's philological methodology as a true historical materialism that dispenses with the crudity of dialectical thinking altogether. For Agamben, it is Adorno who is the vulgar dialectical thinker who invokes a mediation that has no substance other than idealism or a crude deterministic Marxism of base determining superstructure, and a prescription of how we get to the base through an interpretation of the superstructure, as he argues:

"Vulgarity is, rather, the attribute of that interpretation which, conceiving the

relationship between structure and superstructure primarily as a relationship of cause and effect, needs 'mediation' and the 'total social process' to give a semblance of meaning to this relationship, and at the same time save its own idealist coyness."[30]

Whilst there is the germ of an argument in Agamben's essay, it is spoiled by his complete misreading of Adorno's relation to dialectical experience, premised on a Heideggerean reading of Hegel. In his account of Adorno's appropriation of Hegel, Agamben quotes from a passage from the Phenomenology of Spirit, which begins with the statement that "The True is the whole".[31] He then proceeds to read Adorno's use of the concept of mediation as a completely unproblematic idealistic rendering of this concept in terms of the truth of the whole, that every particular only gains its truth in an absolute whole. There is no reference to Adorno's programmatic reversal of Hegel's dictum into the "whole is the untrue", or his many statements such as "the totality of the universal expresses its own failure".[32] Agamben's fundamental misunderstanding is that when Adorno refers to the total social process, he refers to an antagonistic or negative totality, a totality that has to be constructed, because it is being lived in the form of a total capitalism, but it is by no means the truth or the endpoint of a dialectical experience. This attribution of a concept of total mediation ignores Adorno's critique of idealism. Agamben may want to make the point that any form of dialectical thinking cannot escape its idealism and has to reckon with the indetermination of its

beginning, but he doesn't do that here, just attributing a concept of mediation to Adorno that he doesn't possess.[33]

However, the germ of the argument is the concept of construction, or what might be termed radical interpretation, and the relation of the object of study to the formation of a critical subjectivity which can experience an aspect of truth, even within a reified whole. The discussion and the distinction between Benjamin and Adorno here becomes clouded because of Adorno's later adoption of many of Benjamin's conceptual terms for the process or experience of construction (such as concepts of constellation and redemption) however, the difference does lie in a certain concept of dialectics, and rests here on distinctions between concept and image to which we now turn.

Concept and Image

Adorno and Benjamin's shared aim is to turn towards the object of reified culture or society and attempt to release that object from its ensnarement in the form of a rigid thinking, without subsuming the particular under a universal. The turn towards the object in dialectical thinking, is a shift of emphasis between particularity and universality, in that the universal appears only through the particular and is captured only fleetingly. Through a certain immersion in objectivity, the reified objects of capitalist culture and society can be released from the grip of conceptual subsumption and figure a new concept of truth. Thus, there is a certain affinity with the motive of phenomenology, in that what it attempts to

release is a process of life itself freed from the capture by concepts. The affinity with phenomenology lies in the Husserlian slogan "to the things themselves", in that Adorno want to account for the meanings of objects in as presuppositionless a way as possible, but without either the bracketing of experience as transcendental epoché, or the positing of an originary unity of intentionality with intended object, of *noema* and *noesis*. This process will have to proceed through the mediation of the categories of thought, the forms of conceptuality which we currently operate with, and through the milieu of a reified contemporary experience. As he states, "there is no knowledge which can repudiate its mediations; it can only reflect them".[34] The question for Adorno is the grounds for the possibility of such a reflection. In an apt metaphor for the dialectics at a standstill, he outlines this proceedure as follows:

> "In its microstructure Hegel's thought and its literary forms are what Walter Benjamin later called "dialectics at a standstill" comparable to the experience the eye has when looking through a microscope at a drop of water that begins to teem with life; except that what that stubborn, spellbinding gaze falls on is not firmly delineated as an object but frayed, as it were, at the edges."[35]

What is interesting about this metaphor is the place of the subject. The immersion into an object is, what Adorno would term elsewhere a "distanced nearness".[36] The object is viewed without presupposition but from a position in which the subject still has a differentiated subject position. The purpose of the immersion in

objectivity is to set into play the sedimented contents of such an object which have been reified within capitalism. Those contents will be both natural and historical: both processes of social labour reified into natural realities as second nature by capitalism, but also the moment of the somatic, of the natural intrinsic to the processes of social labour. This is the first sense of the speculative move in this materialist dialectics, the idea of a dialectics as a resuscitation, a bringing to life of the object of study, which can only be accomplished through a different attitude to objectivity. However, to be successful, this resuscitation must involve a certain construction of the material, a theory must await this experience of immersion. There is a strong tension here between a dissolution of subjectivity and its preservation, a tension that is stressed differently by Benjamin and Adorno. For Benjamin, the important moment of construction is the experience of the immersion in the object as a closed object of reified life, in the letters to Adorno, he refers to it as a "monad".[37] This construction in Benjamin is the interpretation and relation of aspects of reified existence which as reified forms of culture can, in the construction of their relation to the possibilities stored within them but not developed, open up possibilities that have been missed and prefigure forms of redemption. The experience of the object as a dialectical image produced through the presentation of textual material is the experience of the truth moment covered over in capitalism. The process of construction in Benjamin is presentational in the sense that the array of direct quotations, or the relation between disparate and diffuse elements of culture, form an image which can be either assimilated consciously or unconsciously. In this regard it is interesting to contrast the reading

that Benjamin gives to the images of surrealism as "profane illumination" with Adorno's account of surrealist images.[38]

It is the concept of a "profane illumination" that Benjamin uses in his essay on surrealism which elucidates both the similarity and difference in Adorno's and Benjamin's usage of dialectical images.[39] In surrealist images, there is a displacement or refusal of identificatory meaning in favour of an experience before meaning, of a threshold where image and language take precedence, and destabilise any conception of meaning or the subject. The subject is destabilised through this experience of surrealist images so that the difference between waking and sleeping is worn down. This is not just an experience of intoxication, although certain experiences of intoxication may prefigure, in a problematic way, such a "profane illumination".[40] Benjamin describes the mechanism on the self in such an experience as a form of dream experience which "loosens individuality like a bad tooth".[41] These surrealist images provide models for the dialectical images Benjamin wants to construct through the presentation of objects and quotations in new and distinct configurations. The presentation of such constellations will give an image-idea of collective possibilities which have been suppressed, particularly in forms of life growing old.

Adorno was critical of this dream element of the dialectical image that Benjamin drew from surrealism. This critique relates to Adorno's own account of surrealist images. The relation of dialectical images to dreaming removes the fetish or reified character of the objects or concepts formed in a constellation. For Adorno the important aspect of the reception of the image in the attempt to

assimilate it is not its analogues in dream experience, but the dual element of both fearing and desiring what is revealed as alien, as dead. The presentation of the dialectical image as constellation is a presentation of something that enables it to be read as a reified existence, something that provokes the subject in fear and also desire, to oscillate as a subjectivity in a form of tension. One pole of this oscillation is the reification of the ego as the subject in "full control of itself and free of all consideration of the empirical world", which then reveals itself as the other pole, as something dead.[42] Thus the dialectic in the reception of the dialectical images of surrealism is thoroughly negative. It is a dialectic through which the subject as supposedly free attempts to approach the image in terms of both fearing and desiring it, and finds its reflection in an image of death, as lack of life itself, this rigid separated ego, without any possibility of movement or change. As Adorno argues:

> "The montages of Surrealism are the true still lives. In making compositions of what is out of date, they create nature morte".[43]

The dialectical force of the fetish character of the object is displaced by attributing a concept of the dream character to the dialectical image, a dream character which falsely invests the image with a possibility for instigating unconscious identifications in the subjective reception of the dialectical image. Adorno's critical force is thus targeted against what he fears is a concept of the collective unconscious within Benjamin's work, which he sees as a means of

synthesising the reception of the dialectical image in consciousness through an immediate identification of possibilities which are brought to light in the presentation of the dialectical image:

> "The idea of the collective consciousness was invented to distract attention from true objectivity, and from alienated subjectivity as its correlate. Our task is to polarize and dissolve this 'consciousness' dialectically in terms of society and singular subjects, not to galvanize it as the imagistic correlate of the commodity character."[44]

Benjamin responds to this critique, by emphasising the importance of a conception of "dream figures" within the dialectical image, particularly in terms of an act of awakening, an awakening in which the image appears. It is this sense of immersion in the objects or concepts that are formed in a constellation which can produce the image in a moment of awakening which is the experience of the image. The dialectical image is not the construction of the constellation, but the experience of this constellation as possibility, as awakening. This does not mean that a theory of reception may still be needed and that the idea of the collective consciousness is only one attempt at this, as Benjamin argues:

> "The dialectical image does not merely copy the dream - I never remotely intended to suggest that. But, it does seem to me that the former contains within itself the exemplary instances, the irruptions of waking consciousness, and

that it is indeed precisely from such places that the figure of the dialectical image first produces itself like that of a star composed of many glittering points. Here too, therefore a bow needs to be stretched, and a dialectic forged: that between the image and the act of waking."[45]

The problem for Adorno is how such a dialectic could be formulated, as it seems to be beyond subject and object mediation. It appears to need a mediation between an "experience without a subject" and an image that appears at the same time as its reception.[46] For Benjamin, the experience of the dialectical image produced through the conceptual construction of the material becomes an experience of something beyond subject and object mediation, an image that flashes up and then consumes itself in its reception. There is a certain relation to a concept of Erlebnis here, obviously not the concept that Benjamin outlines in terms of information and surface experience, but the concept of an experience which changes all other forms of experience, the experience which transforms both the temporality of experience (it is not experienced as a continuity) and the subject-object relation within experience (this is dissolved). What Benjamin acknowledges is that there is no route back from such an emphatic dissolution of the subject in the dialectical image, there is not a second moment of theorisation. The tension in the debate between Adorno and Benjamin, then, rests on this question as to whether the experience of immersion can be recuperated as a subjective experience, or must be understood as fundamentally an experience without a subject. The philological method, that Agamben refers to, stakes

everything on this experience of a dialectical image through a certain constellation of concepts. The dialectical image is related to Benjamin's speculative concept of experience, which in turn is related to his early project of attempting to overcome the Kantian antinomies through a different concept of thinking beyond the subject-object relation as an overcoming rather than a synthesis. This would be a move that could overcome the limits of Kantian reason through a certain concept of experience. This speculative concept of experience is still fundamentally Kantian, in the sense that the experience of the dialectical image is the experience of a certain changed concept of time, Jetzseit, a now-time, where what has been is gathered into a present moment, that can, even momentarily gather together and complete time. This is fundamentally still a Kantian experience, in that it is an experience that depends upon a schematism through time, only this form of schematism through the Jetzseit fundamentally alters normal forms of temporality and subject-object relations. Whereas the Kantian schematism secures the object, Benjamin's procedure fundamentally dissolves subject-object relations in an emphatic experience. This absolute experience is nevertheless only possible historically, because it can only be legible given a particular historical configuration. This is how Benjamin tries to distinguish such a concept of absolute experience from an experience of absolute essence, as he writes:

> "What distinguishes images from the 'essences' of phenomenology is their historical index ... they attain to legibility only at a particular time ... truth is charged to the bursting point with time."[47]

This account relies on a concept of the legibility of phenomena in the world, that phenomena can be read as texts, and also on a certain messianic concept of redemptive time, both of which are highly speculative concepts. However, the concept of dialectical image is productive of a changed conception of the dialectic in a way that Adorno's concept-laden dialectics cannot be, because Benjamin has a productive moment within his dialectics that is not sublation in idealistic terms, but the production of immanent speculative experiences through the apprehension of dialectical images. Benjamin's use of image enables him to recast and inflect the Kantian concept of intuition through different spatial and temporal forms.[48] This reformulation of dialectics then moves decisively away from a Hegelian concept of mediation, but still constructs a mediation nevertheless, as Peter Osborne writes:

> "There *is* mediation in the experience of the dialectical image: a mediation between the lived historical present of the 'now' and a specific past, via the perspective of history as a redemptive whole."[49]

Thus Agamben concedes too much in his attempted defence of Benjamin as a non-dialectical thinker, in that the philological presentation of the monad contains a mediation in the form of its relation to history and a conception of time. The characterisation of the philological method as the method, without "dialectical precautions", that can "kiss the frog of praxis on the mouth" and turn it into a

prince, ignores the fact that this new conception of the dialectic has a concept of mediation and time to grapple with.[50] Agamben does acknowledge this, and many of the remaining essays in the collection Infancy and History concern a relation to a messianic concept of time. However, acknowledging the mediation in Benjamin's dialectic would draw attention to the fact that it is actually his dialectic that has a concept of the whole, of history as completed in the time of redemption, even if this is immediately consumed, and then referred to the production of revolutionary practice resulting from this experience.[51] The idea of a completion of experience in time actually has a more Hegelian structure in terms of the immanent circularity of the dialectic than Adorno's transformation of Hegelian dialectics into negative dialectics does. The structure of now-time as an "eternal present" can be reconfigured in Hegelian terms as the absolute subject-object, substance-universal that is produced through history and appears in time.[52] In this sense, Hegel's idealism and Benjamin's messianic retrieval are compatible. However, Adorno's critique of Hegelian mediation is its presumption of the whole as the true, this structure of circularity, which already presumes an outcome to the dialectic. When Adorno attempts to characterise the dialectic in terms of the time of the dialectic it is not as an opening up to a completion, but as a series of intermittences of stops and starts; the movement of the dialectic is a movement of fixed and dynamic elements that is never completed. Benjamin's use of the dialectical image enables him to articulate a positive concept of experience that can, as a lived experience, grasp the absolute immanently, but he can only have such a concept if his idea of a messianic fulfillment of time is also accepted.

Despite Adorno's invocation of Benjaminian themes in his later writings, when he outlines a conception of the dialectical image, it is always inflected negatively, and in the sense of something that can negate the current experience of reification rather than offer a positive image of redemption. This is Adorno's minimal description of the dialectical image in his lectures on metaphysics:

> " ... it is a condition of metaphysical experience that it can miss the mark, that it can be quite wrong, and that, on the other, it requires an objective moment, antithetical to it and incapable of being assimilated to it – that these two motifs together form the dialectical figure, the dialectical image."[53]

Adorno's formulation of the dialectical image here is twofold. First, in terms of its fragility, that it is always vulnerable to failure. This is the element that Benjamin refers to as catastrophe, that the opportunity of metaphysical experience may be missed. This is not a presupposition of the dialectical image in Benjamin, but a danger that it is fundamentally unstable, and that the right configuration may not be traced to produce the experience. The second characteristic that Adorno maintains is that this experience remains a mediated subject-object experience, that there must always be a moment of something ineliminable, or material, even within the metaphysical experience. This is specifically what Benjamin was attempting to move beyond with his concept of speculative experience, either configured through the dissolution of the subject in experience, or the dissolution of the subject into a collective subject, or the attempt to dissolve the antinomy between knowledge and

perception through the production of images which could be the foundations of an emphatic experience, that in itself could serve as the motor for revolutionary experience.

It is easy to see here why Adorno's new conception of the dialectic may seem denuded in comparison with Benjamin, even if we don't accept Agamben's presentation of the debate. Benjamin's conception of a redemptive completion of time in the dialectical image was itself dialectically inflected by his attempts to read this redemptive moment materially, as different modes in which the absolute could be realised immanently in the most individual and particular moments. Peter Osborne has outlined how Benjamin's account of the photograph as image, which is both singular, and potentially infinitely reproducible instantiates a certain form of the iconic (ideational or absolute) side of images, with their instantiation in history as reproducible. As he argues:

> "Benjamin replaced the simple theological unity of the image's participation in the divine with the multiform, materially diverse, series of concrete unities of indexicality and iconicity made up by the history of technical reproduction."[54]

The illumination of the photograph is the capturing of the particular experiences that are fleetingly gestured towards in Surrealist images. The fleeting experiences and gestures which are captured in early photography, captured as moments in time, can be studied in terms of the possibilities within such early photographs that have been missed. The possibility that we may recover such fleeting gestures

is released by the technology of the photograph in terms of its reproducibility. But, there is still no key to the legibility of the particular instantiation of the idea within the image. This is not really the critique that Adorno provides, in that in his conception of constellation, the idea of an image as an instantiation of an idea of truth remains, but as a horizon, rather than a definitive lived experience. Constellation is a weak imagism, in the sense that its power to form compelling images is always curtailed by the constitution of constellations as a mediation between one concept which calls for another concept in an attempt to unseal the truth of the object. Adorno's account of a certain immersion in objectivity, conveyed through the experience of the art object can provide a more realised form of reconciliation, as the communication of the differentiated, as the aesthetic experience does not consist in the formation of judgements. However, the experience of negative dialectics as self-reflection moves within a mediation between construction, interpretation and expression in which there is no final redemptive experience.

Construction, Interpretation, Expression

For Adorno, dialectical experience remains at the level of the contradiction between the concept and object, and its speculative import remains through the concept, rather than in the construction of image. In a critique of dialectics as it became reified by Soviet ideologists, Adorno outlines his understanding of dialectics as materialism without images:

"Dialectics lies in things, but it could not exist without the consciousness that reflects it - no more than it can evaporate into that consciousness. The thought is not an image of the thing. . .the thought aims at the thing itself ... What clings to the image remains idolatry, mythic enthrallment. The totality of images blends into a wall before reality. The image theory denies the spontaneity of the subject, a *movens* of the objective dialectics of productive forces and conditions ... Nothing but an indefatigably reified consciousness will believe ... that it possesses photographs of objectivity."[55]

Adorno's target here is not Benjamin's dialectical images, but a cruder theory of materialism as a naïve realism, but the critique retains its force when applied to Benjamin, at the level of the importance that Adorno applies to a concept of reflection as central to any dialectical experience, and a concept of reflection as experience that is fundamentally Hegelian. Hegel's insight in his concept of experience, is this doubling of reflection involved in the self-reflection of an immediate experience as mediated both through the subject's relation to the object and the object's relation to the subject. For Adorno, this dialectical experience escapes its idealistic inflection as a philosophy of consciousness through the Marxist emphasis on the relation between subject and object as one of social labour. The experience of the object as mediated rather than immediate is the experience of the reified object as having embedded within it the social relations of its production. However, this moment of social labour must not be hypostasised

in itself to a metaphysical principle, as it relies on a mediation between labour and nature where neither are completely subsumed by the other. Therefore, Adorno twists and inflects Marx's materialist critique of Hegel, by proposing a further dialectical critique of Marx:

> " ... the step by which labour sets itself up as the metaphysical principle pure and simple is none other than the consistent elimination of the "material" to which all labour feels itself tied, the material that defines its boundary for it, reminds it of what is below it, and relativises its sovereignty."[56]

This is the twofold materialist speculative thinking that I have outlined above. As Adorno states, there is no "stepping out of the world constituted by labour into another and unmediated one", but the process of mediation itself never completely subsumes the natural moment within the historical act.[57] The dialectic of nature and history remains the consistent thematic throughout Adorno's work. The immersion in objectivity then cannot be at the cost of a critical subject able to reflect upon that objectivity, which is at the core of dialectical experience.

In the above discussion I have concentrated on the construction and interpretation of the life in objects conceived as the embeddedness of forms of social labour within objects, and the attempt at a dialectical experience to bring those objects back to life. As we have seen, there is a further moment in Adorno's speculative dialectics and that is the natural or somatic. The natural element within this dialectics relates to the speculative concept of an expressive philosophy, which

leads on to the non-conceptual in terms of the somatic. Expression here becomes the expression of an ineliminable material moment within thought. How can we give any content to this moment of life in things, in terms of an expressive philosophy ?

Expressive Philosophy: The Life of Things

At the beginning of the chapter, I outlined Adorno's experience of negative dialectics as a deepened form of self-reflection, which doesn't result in the emptiness of a subject always beside or ahead of itself, or a subject as empty law-giver above the law. Adorno attempts to think the subject as a body that thinks. To be more accurate we could call this an experience of the ineliminable materiality of thought itself. What does it mean to call this an experience ? It is this question that I will try to respond to in the final section of this chapter. It is a difficult question for Adorno, as it is an experience that only occurs negatively, through the deepening of contradictions, which cause a certain shattering of the ego, in its realisation of its dependence on the natural moment it has suppressed. This experience is then an experience of a remnant or addendum. The inability to accurately identify such a moment is due to the different connotations that Adorno gives to this ineliminable materiality, different connotations which may serve as a model for a constellation of concepts which try to express something that cannot be easily conceptualised, but nevertheless cause certain difficulties in attempting to understand this life of things.

At one level, Adorno emphasises this materialism as a logical implication of all thought, a certain emphasis on the reliance of all ontological categories on a certain material "something". Adorno tends to assert this rather than argue for it. So he states:

> "There is no Being without entities. "Something" - as a cogitatively indispensable substrate of any concept, including the concept of Being - is the utmost abstraction of the subject-matter that is not identical with thinking, an abstraction not to be abolished by any further thought process."[58]

This is no more than the Kantian thing-in-itself, in the sense that there can be no concepts without intuitions. Adorno needs more than a noumenon, he needs a material moment as the noumenal which can matter for thought, that can be experienced rather than just conceived.

To try and rectify this Adorno argues for a form of thought that is not fundamentally divided from affect. The motive for thought itself, rather than a will as transcendental ego, will be related to pleasure and need. Pleasure and need are not separate from thinking but the motor, or the unrest that drives thinking. The primary drive for such a thinking is the suffering of the body, the physical moment within thought that is registered as a lack of bodily fulfillment. Thinking is therefore, deeply motivated by the suffering body.

But, why is the body suffering ? To answer this question Adorno moves to the theory of Freudian psychoanalysis. The history of civilisation is the history of a

renunciation of instinct in favour of societal happiness. But, in the historical form that such a renunciation has taken, in capitalist society, the subject experiences this renunciation as a loss. The supposed gain from individual renunciation, is not worth the repression. What lives on in the subject are then the sexual instincts that are suppressed in favour of a drive for self-preservation in the progress of civilisation.

We have seen in chapter three how Adorno gives a more nuanced account of this repression of sexual instincts in favour of civilisation, in the sense that what is prior to the ego, in terms of instinctive drive can be just as destructive as it is liberating. Adorno's account of civilisation is not a straightforward account of renunciation of instinct, in the sense that enlightenment is a necessary and progressive process of separation from dominating nature, however it is in the form of such a separation that an entwinement with nature is lost. In terms of this conception of the ineliminable materiality, Adorno refers to it as the "impulse before the ego", and he calls for an "anamnesis of the untamed impulse that precedes the ego".[59] This concept of a remembering, or bringing back into the present something fundamentally lost, is therefore, one past-oriented way of reviving a concept of life before repression. The concept of anamnesis suggests that such an untamed impulse resides somewhere within the subject, unchanged by history.

Finally, Adorno will write about the addendum as the result of a certain experience of negative dialectics, as a residue of what remains after the determinate negation of the conceptual categories. Such an experience, is the

experience of a loss of ego, but nevertheless a desubjectification which doesn't result in the merging of subject and object. Such an experience is registered physically as both fear at the loss of ego, a certain vertigousness, but also in experiences which don't fulfill themselves. The paradigmatic experience in this sense, for Adorno, is happiness. What is constitutive of such experiences is an opening, a possibility that that the subject may exist in a different relation to objectivity, but this cannot be formulated as a completed outline of a fulfilled experience of life, as it occurs at the very limits of the possibility of experience as defined by the social form in which experience takes place, the society of capitalist exchange. This is not a transcendental experience, in terms of a form of rationality that would lie beneath or beyond identity thinking, as its completion or suppressed ground. It is impossible to give any account of a fulfilled rationality, and when Adorno refers to concepts such as "affinity", he is clear that it is not:

> " ... a remnant which cognition hands us after the identifying schemata of the categorial machinery have been eliminated. Rather, affinity is the definite negation of those schemata."[60]

The attempt to resuscitate or gesture towards the archaic either in terms of impulses, or as we have seen earlier, in terms of a mimetic faculty that migrates into aesthetic comportment unchanged by the vicissitudes of history results in a gestural thinking of the material within thought. The problem for Adorno is to account for this survival of an impulse, this living on within the subject, of

something before the subject. Adorno defines the will in terms of a dependence on impulse and a separation from impulse, but an impulse that always returns. This theory of repression taken from Freud is problematic, because it assumes that the impulse, or the Freudian drive mechanism are ahistorical and interact with the social repression in terms of a return of the repressed which is unaffected historically. Adorno's argument that there is a survival of the will, a "nachleben", within the subject, a living on, needs to have a more mediated grounding.[61] As it is formulated, at times, it is a polar opposition between an ahistorical concept of drives within the subject, repressed in terms of the historical formation of the ego.[62] However, there is no detailed account of the history of the drives themselves in their relation to a return as this ineliminable materiality. This leads to the gesture towards a bad sense of speculation, in terms of an anamnestic recovery of impulse which has no material grounding. Adorno writes of the somatic impulse of the will entering into the imagination in the following terms:

> "A will without physical impulses, impulses that survive, weak-ended (abgeschwächt), in imagination, would not be a will."[63]

There is a problem of how to translate the German word 'abgeschwächt' here, which Ashton attempts with this formulation "weak-ended", which doesn't make a great deal of sense in English. I understand Adorno to mean here that the impulse survives in a weakened form, through a process of raising it to the sphere of the imagination, as a need that remains as an unrest within thought, as something

bodily, which motivates towards a different mode of living which wouldn't repress instinctuality. This is what Adorno means by suffering driving thought:

> "This doctrine is easy to criticise as secretly expressing a naïve naturalism. In fact it is a last epistemological quiver of the somatic element, before that element is totally expelled. It is the somatic element's survival, in knowledge, as the unrest that reproduces itself in the advancement of knowledge ... The physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different. 'Woe speaks: Go'."[64]

What is needed to give this account some concretion is an account of the relation between body and thought, in terms of how the process of a survival of the somatic element survives, is weakened, and migrates into other modes of comportment such as aesthetic comportment. What does weakening mean here ? What is the process of survival, and how does this survival enable us to approach the object in order to register the speculative material experience as negative self-reflection, which can prefigure the possibility of something other ?

Adorno needs to give some account of the relation between embodied thought and its historical entanglement in conceptual thinking, other than through an opposition of ego and id. Although he attempts to historicise Freud, by adapting some of Freud's middle period work in terms of the blurring of boundaries of ego and id, and the importance of a concept of narcissism due to its account of how the subject can identify with its own false needs, Adorno is caught on the

horns of a dilemna. He is fundamentally opposed to any concept of a timeless unconscious, whether that is configured in Oedipal terms or as a collective consciousness, and thus his references to survival and anamnesis, need to account for the historical changes in the phenomenon that is being recovered. However, he also needs a notion of a material element to thought which is going to move thought beyond its current reified context, if his metaphysics is going to be a materialist metaphysics. One way of attempting to negotiate such a problem would be an analysis of embodied thought, not in terms of a fundamental ontology, or a set of relations of material inference, but as a historical phenomenology of the body. Adorno resists such a concentrated formulation, because he would have to go to certain aspects of Heidegger's work, in order to give an account of being-in-the-world, in terms of embodiment. This would give Adorno some more content to respond to the question of what he means by this indissoluble something as a physical suffering. This is not to say that this would be an ontological account, it would need to be historicised in itself.

One example of such an approach, would be to try and think Adorno`s concept of "distanced nearness", in terms of what Merleau-Ponty has termed the bodily experience of "touched-touching".[65] The concept of the "touched-touching" arises from a reflection on a particular bodily experience. If I touch my left hand with my right hand, I will the act of raising my right hand and touching my left. However, once I reflect on such an action I realise that in the touching of my left hand, my right hand is also being touched by the left, a form of touching that is unwilled but as the consequence of my initial act of touch I am also being

touched. The body is, therefore, "both thing and vehicle of my relation to things".[66] Merleau-Ponty attempts to build an analogy in this reflection on bodily experience to our further experience of being amongst objects, or in relation to objects in the world, in that there is something about our relationality to the world that corresponds to this core structure of a 'touched-touching', of an activity which is also as activity intrinsically a passivity:

> "The relation with the world is included in the relation of the body with itself. The relation of my two hands = the exchange between them; the touched hand is given to the touching hand as touching; they are the mirror of each other - something analogous in the relation with the things: they touch me just as I touch them. Not surprising: They are that on which the synergy of my body opens; they are made of the same stuff as the corporeal schema; I haunt them at a distance, they haunt me at a distance".[67]

What this analysis of the body as a certain relationality gives is a concrete physical instantiation of a model for auratic experience, which is taken out of the purely visual sphere. Understanding the auratic in terms of an attitude towards objectivity of a "distanced nearness" can here have a grounding in embodiment. The particular form of human embodiment, encapsulated in the ability to be close to objects in the world, yet distanced, is encapsulated in the form of a relation of a "touched-touching". Such a bodily relation will change over time, through transformations in bodily experience, and our relation with objects, but provides a

grounding for a comportment towards objectivity which could exist with objects without dominating or dissolving into the object. The concept of a "distanced nearness" as a visual concept is far more difficult to account for, as Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the "eye cannot see the eye, as the hand touches the other hand".[68] The shifting of a concept of the auratic from the realm of iconic or aesthetic images to the realm of objectivity per se in terms of a visual experience of something as a "unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may", does not give us a coherent account of the immersion in objectivity, in which as nature a subject separates itself from nature. The contemplative look that Adorno writes about in terms of a distanced nearness still has an element of too much of the objectifying gaze, therefore a distance without nearness.[69] Adorno's account of this "distanced nearness" is as follows in Minima Moralia:

> "But in the long, contemplative look that fully discloses people and things, the urge towards the object is always deflected, reflected. Contemplation without violence, the source of all the joy of truth, presupposes that he who contemplates does not absorb the object into himself: a distanced nearness."[70]

An analysis of this relation in terms of the bodily relation of a "touched-touching" would enable a more concrete description and understanding of what such an immersion in objectivity could mean as "distanced nearness". Such a description bases itself upon an embodied place of thought within the world, due to certain capacities of the body. This capacity resides in an affectivity of the

body, its ability to both be alongside and separate from objectivity, even conceived in terms of its own body.

This is not to say that such an embodied relating should be hypostasised in itself, as beyond the historical. In accordance with the idea of natural history, such an ontological turn could be historicised in itself. In fact, the grounding for such a historicisation lies in the account of a destruction of experience which is largely configured in bodily terms, as the replacement of a bodily relation to the world in terms of the growth of forms of living which privilege the body as a pure stimulus-response mechanism. The instantaneity of response caused by the shock effect of modern forms of life (such as the assembly line, the experience of the modern city) moulds and adapts the body in new ways, as a centre or field of tension, exposed to these currents of change. This is Benjamin's formulation in the essay on "Experience and Poverty", of the "tiny, fragile human body", which lies at the mercy of a "field of destructive torrents and explosions".[71] Such a thinking of the body in terms of it as the locus for the destruction of a certain form of experience, would also inevitably have to account for the new possibilities revealed to the body by technological developments and attempt to relate these to the system of exchange. It is not that this argument is not elaborated in Adorno's work, for example, in his analyses of the changes in forms of listening to music produced by the culture industry, it is just that the thinking through of the concept of the body as implicated in thought is not conceived primarily in any other way than the hydraulic model of drive and repression in Freudian theory.

There is a good reason for this, in that any statement of what it means for a body to be our locus within the world, can tend towards an absolutisation of such an experience. Merleau-Ponty tends towards this with his ontological conceptualisation of the "touched-touching" relation as the concept of "flesh". As he argues that:

> "If it is true that as soon as philosophy declares itself to be reflection or coincidence, it prejudges what it will find, then once again it must recommence everything, reject the instruments reflection and intuition had provided themselves, and install itself in a locus where they have not yet been distinguished, in experiences that have not yet been 'worked over', that offer us all at once pell-mell both 'subject' and 'object'."[72]

Adorno's critique of damaged life demonstrates that there is no such location that can be preserved pristine and immediate. To mistake the bodily relating as ontological ultimate is the mistake of identifying the "remnants" of life for the absolute itself.[73] Simon Jarvis has noted that Adorno's speculation calls for a new "phenomenology of affect" which may owe more to "Proust rather than Husserl".[74] Any such phenomenology though will have to deal with the very affects as historically transformed that are to be described. The problem for a new phenomenology of affect even in a Proustian form as a phenomenology of the involuntary recall of affects now decomposed is that such an involuntary recall either presumes the experience to be recalled in involuntary memory occurred at

a certain temporal moment, and therefore is accessible, or argues that the initial experience itself was unconscious. Adorno's dispute with Benjamin about the characteristics of the mémoire involuntaire coalesces around this point. Benjamin argues that the initial moment was unconscious, and Adorno disagrees. However, if the initial taste or experience is not unconscious, the recovery of such an experience has to exist within the lifetime of somebody who originally had such an experience. Surveying the history of affects from the stance of a completed destruction of experience would mean that there were no experiences there to be recalled. The generation that had gone to "school in the streetcar", and now finds itself plunged into rapid change, according to Benjamin's formulation, is now dead. We are all living through a rapid process of change that would not allow for the recall of such affects, even in involuntary memory. If there is to be a Proustian moment in the phenomenology of affect, it will be oriented towards the future in terms of an unfulfilled experience that opens up possibilities, in terms of the Proustian place-name, an experience which we will discuss in the final chapter. Perhaps the either-or between Proust and Husserl is too stark, and we need an element of Proust, and an element of the phenomenology of being-in-the-world in terms of embodiment that I have attempted to elucidate via certain aspects of Merleau-Ponty's thought. Nevertheless, Jarvis is correct in his argument that we cannot refuse an attempt to construct any means of theorising these "traces" of the natural, particularly as "current circumstances turn out to go on and on being current".[75]

However, I think that Adorno's negative experiential project of a life at the limits of the possibility of thought, which is produced through the immanent negation of conceptual categories provides a useful means of attempting to articulate the possibility of life. Similarly to Benjamin's concept of dialectical images, such an experience is produced by the determinate negation of the conceptual categories in a process of reflection that will produce an experience that cannot be articulated without the process of negative dialectical thinking itself. There cannot be a description of the experience of the material within and without the subject, the subjective experience against the 'I', without the process of contradictions that are outlined through a process of critical self-reflection. In this sense, the somatic moment as an experience of desubjectification, both painful sundering of the ego and opening to other possibilities for subjectivity is Adornian sublation, but a sublation that does not rest in fulfillment or closure, but an opening that calls for both political action and a further hyper-reflection. It calls for political action, as this experience of a possibility of a different relation between subject and object, could only be achieved in a stable mode through the transformation of the exchange economy which determines relations between subject and object in terms of abstract equivalence. It calls for a hyper-reflection, because the description of such a process of negative dialectics as resulting in a momentary sublation, nevertheless builds a system of reason which in itself starts to mimic the false whole of social totality. Therefore such a speculative experience will rest on a concept of possibility which exists in the contradiction between both the affirmation of something transcendent to conceptual categorisation and its

denial. Adorno formulates this concept of possibility in terms of a project for metaphysical experience as the question that a materialist metaphysics poses is the possibility of living today.

This possibility of life is also the question that Agamben poses in relation to the project of attempting to construct a form of life in which something like a bare life cannot be isolated. Adorno and Agamben share an affinity in their discussions of the reduction of life in modernity which reaches its apotheosis in the camps, and continues as a paradigm for modern political societies in Agamben's contemporary analyses. Both further differentiate their concepts of life from any naturalistic grounding, although Adorno's project attempts more of a dialectical relation to the moment of the natural within the historical. In the next chapter I will consider the experience of life as a possibility which lies at the margins of the current state of damaged life. This is an experience that both Agamben and Adorno attempt to link to a concept of possibility drawn from Aristotelian origins. However, the difference between their approaches will give a fundamentally different inflection to what a critical rescue of an experience of a 'life that does not live' might mean.

Chapter 7: The Possibility of Living Today

In his lectures on metaphysics, Adorno writes: " ... the question whether it is still possible to live is the form in which metaphysics impinges on us urgently today."[1] I argued in the previous chapter why such a question is speculative, as the possibility of life has been removed to the margins of human experience. In the first two chapters of this thesis I outlined the process whereby life in reified society has been reduced to a form of "life that does not live" and articulated how the concept of bare life outlined by Giorgio Agamben could give further content to such a concept of damaged life. In this chapter I want to consider the possibility of life today, in terms of an experience of life that lies at the limits of reified experience. This experience is tied to the experience of freedom, in that the constellation of concepts of possibility, life and metaphysical experience result in a negative articulation of freedom. I think that this is a project shared by Agamben and Adorno because they are both concerned with a form of experience that is not posited as a sovereign transgression of the bounds of actual experience, but holds itself in reserve in relation to any projected project of liberation, whether this be configured in terms of a bursting of the bonds of the current reified existence through desire or an affirmation of a life beyond the human. Both thinkers also attempt to resist the nihilistic tendencies of an intrinsically negative thought, through a refusal to embrace pure negativity as negativity, although, as we

will see Agamben ultimately fails to articulate a concept of freedom which can resist its own negativity, because of his lack of a materialist or historical thinking.

The nihilism I am referring to here is one intrinsic to the very concept of a "life that does not live", intrinsic in the sense that the temptation is to emphasise in the denial of life a means beyond life. Such a formulation has a dialectical air about it, but ultimately, if it is thought without mediation it becomes a simple identification with the forms of power that have produced such a situation. It becomes such an identification because it affirms the site of bare life as the route through which and by which redemption occurs. It is an affirmation of a redemptive value in extreme degradation.

The negativity intrinsic to a concept of a life that does not live results from an ontology of the false state of the world. As Christoph Menke has argued, this results in certain forms of saying "no" to life.[2] These forms of negation are not absolute in themselves, but attempts to open up a possibility of things being otherwise through a negation of the current circumstances. Such a process could easily find itself caught between a spritualising or nihilistic stance. The spiritualising stance would be an affirmation of a position beyond the status quo, as an existing redemptive state opened up by the negativity of an ontology of the false state of things. Nihilism would be to affirm the existence of a damaged life in itself as the only form of life possible. The concept of possibility, and its variant as potentiality in the work of Agamben, will hold itself in a peculiar relation to actuality. The possibility of life in Adorno's work will refer to the possibility of an experience of something that can be actual, but at the same time

beyond the bounds of possibility. To affirm its actuality, without recognising its intrinsically negative and unrealised character, is the spiritualising mode of redemption. To affirm only the impossibility of such an experience is to accept the immanent context and that there can be no form of life that moves beyond such a context. This would be the nihilistic move. One way to resolve this would be a withdrawal from life itself, an affirmative concept of a "life that does not live". Adorno mentions this as a ploy in the following terms, when trying to respond to the possibility of living today:

> " ... one might well compare this situation to that of the philosophy of late antiquity, in which, in response to the same question (the possibility of life), people fell back on expedients such as ataraxy, that is, the deadening of all affects, just to be capable of living at all ... I would say that even this standpoint, although it emphatically embraces the idea of the freedom of the individual, nevertheless has a moment of narrow mindedness in the sense that it renders absolute the entrapment of human beings by the totality, and thus sees no other possibility than to submit."[3]

Adorno emphasises an element in this embrace of a denial of life as a form of freedom, but then withdraws it. My argument here will be that if we attempt a critical rescue of a concept of life through an immanent critique of damaged life, then it is not a desirable result to arrive at something that is very much like death, sheer stasis. Ultimately, this is where Agamben's thinking of a potentiality

that holds itself as potentiality arrives. Now, there is a need for caution. The Homo Sacer project is incomplete and Agamben has spoken about a volume which will give more content to a concept of form of life in which something like a bare life cannot be isolated. However, his statement that in this projected volume he will be turning away from a historical reading doesn't indicate that he is moving in a direction that would negate my criticisms here.[4]

Readings of Aristotle

Both Adorno and Agamben's concepts of possibility refer back to Aristotelian discussions of the concept, and these readings determine the different paths that the concept of possibility takes in their respective thought. Ultimately, it is a question of matter, in that the salient importance of Aristotle's conception of possibility for Adorno is that it is tied to matter rather than form, while Agamben does not interpret or refer to this element of Aristotelian theory.

To refer to Aristotelian theory here is somewhat disingenuous, as the concept of possibility appears in different guises in Aristotle's work, and is interpreted in different ways by commentators on Aristotle.[5] The aim of my argument here is therefore not to appraise different readings in terms of a correct interpretation, but to explore how these different emphases in reading Aristotle give rise to very divergent constructions of the concept of possibility.

Aristotle's concept of possibility relates to the difference between dynamis and energeia, which Agamben reads as an opposition of potentiality to actuality. This

opposition is important for Agamben as it is through such an opposition that he wants to interrogate the meaning of possibility within human action, what it means when someone says "I can, I cannot".[6] The problem for Agamben's reading is that he appropriates these terms from Aristotle's account of possibility, without a sense of their distinctive Aristotelian usage. For Agamben, possibility is prior to actuality, and the problem is how possibility becomes actual. Formally, the problem becomes for Agamben, an attempt to think a form of possibility that does not exhaust its potentiality in its actualisation. However, there is no recognition that for Aristotle, actuality is prior to possibility. In his Metaphysics Aristotle writes, "We have discussed the various senses of 'prior', and it is clear that actuality is prior to potentiality."[7] This is clearly not the sense of a relation between possibility and actuality that we are usually dealing with, for example in terms of causal relations. The reason for Aristotle's distinctiveness here is his attempt to transform the Platonic idea, and preserve elements of its timelessness, but to relate it materially to a world that changes. The Platonic idea is related to form, to actuality, in terms of dynamis, but this actuality as form is prior to all possibilities which in some way exist in an unfulfilled state in search of a form. As Aristotle writes: "For of non-existent things, some exist potentially, but they do not exist, because they do not exist in fulfillment."[8] This paradoxical statement only makes some sense if related to the distinction between dynamis and energeia, which does not map straightforwardly onto a distinction between possibility and actuality. Energeia is form in so far as it is realised in matter, a force which as immanent idea moves matter towards a realisation. Form is a substrate, a substance of which

the stuff of matter partakes. This is the transposition of Platonic Ideas into Aristotelian philosophy. The Platonic Forms or Ideas exist, but not transcendent to matter rather as immanent to their development. Therefore, dynamis as pure possibility is the thought of matter without form, existing in pure possibility awaiting a form. For Aristotle, it is the ideas as substantial immanent forms that have a higher reality than pure possibility as matter, and need to be thought of as prior but in relation to possibility. This is why some non-existent things can exist potentially, in terms of Aristotle's formulation, but not actually, because they have not been formed, they are not existing in fulfilled form. Thus, Adorno formulates Aristotle's conception of possibility as a reversal of our understanding of the relation between possibility and actuality:

> "To state the position paradoxically, reality in Aristotle's philosophy corresponds to what we call possibility and possibility to what we call reality."[9]

Our modern understanding of the relation between possibility and actuality is of pure possibility as pure form in search of contingent content, and when we speak of reality or actuality we mean something filled with a sensible content. Whereas the opposite appears to be the case in Aristotle's thought. For Aristotle, energeia as form is the higher form of reality, whereas pure possibility as matter is not in accordance with the real or the actual.

Agamben's concept of potentiality and its relation to possibility is not clearly delineated in his writings. He notes that Aristotle refers to two kinds of

potentiality. First, there is a potentiality which is developmental in nature, and refers to inherent human capacities that can develop over time. The second form of potentiality relates to a capacity which a person has that can be actualised or not actualised, such as the potential of the poet to write a poem.[10] Such a potentiality is related to a contingency, that an action may or may not take place. Such a contingency can be read in terms of either the fact that certain actions take place but are not necessary, or in terms of an indeterminateness, a contingency in which something can be in one way or another without either having a certain prevalence or priority.[11] For Aristotle, contingency is related to a certain potentiality which can either become actual or not. That which has a potentiality to be also has a potentiality not to be. In this sense there is a pure possibility as potentiality which is this radical contingency, or pure possibility. For Aristotle, possibility is related to contingency, as each potentiality can fail at any time to be actualised. However, as we have seen this potentiality resides in a particular conception of the relation between matter and form.

Both Adorno and Agamben stress the concept of dynamis in their reading of Aristotle, this concept of pure potentiality or possibility, as a form of radical contingency. However, for Agamben this is a radical contingency related in some way to the will. As we have seen earlier, Agamben talks about the formulation of potentiality in terms of the question "I can, I cannot". Agamben moves between readings of De Anima and the Metaphysics and this is perhaps why his concept of potentiality does not relate to the context upon which Adorno draws in terms of matter as pure possibility in his reading of the Metaphysics. However, for both

thinkers, the central concept is that of pure possibility and its mode of existence as pure possibility. Agamben reads this as: " ... a potentiality that is not simply the potential to do this or that thing but potential to not-do, potential not to pass into actuality."[12] He interprets a certain phrase of Aristotle's as stating that all potentiality is an impotentiality, all potentiality exists as potentiality in the possibility that it might not realise itself as actual. Aristotle writes that: "What is potential is capable of not being in actuality. What is potential can both be and not be, for the same is potential both to be and not to be."[13]

Agamben reads this passage as the "originary figure of potentiality, which we may now define with his own words as the *potential not to be*".[14] He doesn't read this passage in the context of the relation of form to matter. In that context, the potentiality not to be is a form of contingency related to the fact that a matter might not find its form. Agamben wants to relate this to a concept of possibility in terms of the will and a passage from potentiality to actuality in terms of the act. But the relation between potentiality and actuality in Aristotle's text here is not related to the problem of a passing over from potentiality to actuality in terms of action, but in terms of the relation of matter as pure possibility to form as its immanent fulfillment. Thus, Agamben's characterisation of the problem of potentiality as that which is "truly potential is thus what has exhausted all its impotentiality in bringing it wholly into the act as such" configures the passage from potentiality to actuality in the form of will. This is not immediately present in the relation of form and matter, as actuality and possibility in Aristotle. The result, for Agamben, is a thinking of possibility as pure negativity, as the existence

of a pure negativity as a hesitancy, an affirmative concept of negativity. In his concept of freedom he tries to think freedom in relation to this potentiality not to be, a potentiality to hold itself in reserve.

Potentiality

As we have seen, the form of potentiality that Agamben takes from Aristotle is a potentiality which conserves itself as potentiality through the refusal to act. The figure that represents this potentiality without action for Agamben is the fictional character in Hermann Melville's short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener". Bartleby is a legal copyist, who joins a firm and refuses to complete work that he is asked to, and even refuses to leave the building when he is sacked. He ends up dying in a state of "radical passivity", when he has been forcibly removed from the legal offices.[15] Bartleby is exemplary in the sense that he separates any notion of the will from its realisation in a determination, an action or a decision. Potentiality is here a radical contingency that refuses to actualise itself, and attempts to hold itself in a state of pure possibility:

> "Bartleby calls into question precisely this supremacy of the will over potentiality ... Bartleby is capable only without wanting ... The formula that he so obstinately repeats destroys all possibility of constructing a relation between being able and willing ... It is the formula of potentiality ... 'I would prefer not to'".[16]

The formula that Bartleby repeats throughout the story, when asked to carry out an act is "I would prefer not to". This formula disengages his action from any form of will or life, but doesn't enable those around him to attribute any meaning to his actions. Bartleby is an exemplar of a "life that does not live", but a form of life that can find a resistance to any form of power that wants to take hold of him. Furthermore, he resists this power not on the grounds of his will or his desire, but on the grounds of a potentiality that never actualises itself. Although Agamben states that this formula is separated from the will, there is still a sense of an active will here. What has happened is that the will has dissolved into an experience of potentiality as potentiality, and discovers itself as will in the formula "I would prefer not to". This formula is neither an "I can" nor an "I cannot", but just this oscillation between the two modes. Bartleby's relation to potentiality is a hovering between affirmation and negation, a hovering between an affirmation of being or a nihilist rejection of being. Agamben terms this an absolute contingent, and it is the basis of his fundamental ontology of potentiality. This absolute contingent relates its contingency (the fact that it could not or could be) to its possibility (as something that can take place). It holds in reserve its actualisation and thus maintains a relation to potentiality as potentiality. This experience of potentiality is an intellectual experience that nevertheless dispenses with a relation to truth, an experience of thought that "frees itself from the principle of reason".[17] This experience is an experience of a form of life in which something like a bare life cannot be isolated, and hence, its importance for Agamben in political terms as

a form of resistance to the sovereign power that operates through the decision on bare life in the state of exception.

What are the features of this experience of freedom as potentiality ? Jean-Luc Nancy has outlined an experience of freedom in a similar way, a freedom that has the following features: freedom is without foundation; there is no subject that can identify its own moment of spontaneity as self-presence as the ground of freedom; the ground of any action is fundamentally an absence of ground. The experience of freedom, therefore, takes place at the limit, or to be more precise, on the limit itself of any experience. This is an experience on the limit because it is an attempt to grasp the essential absence at the heart of human experience itself and move beyond all thought as determinate. This thought as "the other thought of all thought ... is the burst of freedom".[18] This lack of foundation is the inaugural experience of freedom itself. It is in the experience of freedom that we become aware of the originary ground of experience as an absence of ground. Experience in this sense is the experience of a nothing at the heart of existence, and the attempt to test the limits of that nothingness. The experience of freedom, therefore opens itself up to the experience of experience itself. If we want to understand experience itself, then what we discover is this experience exposed at the limits, without foundation or grounding, but attempting to found its place on such a ground:

> "What makes experience here is the carrying to this extremity where there is nothing, except through the decision of foundation, and as this decision ... the

experience of having nothing given, nothing founded, the experience of owning no capital of experience, the inaugural experience of experience itself."[19]

Why the move to a decision here, an appropriation of this experience of freedom in terms of a decision ? The necessity for such a move is that Nancy describes evil in terms of the action that posits itself as spontaneous cause, as the identity of a self-present subject that can initiate causal series. The spontaneous cause refuses the absence at the heart of experience, and therefore cannot tolerate anything that is not identical with its grounding of itself in experience. Evil is fundamentally a positivity which cannot tolerate its negative ground. The experience of freedom is the ability to tolerate this non-identity at the heart of thought. Experience "does not belong to itself", but when it tests itself on the limit, "it is returned to what it is not".[20] Evil is the insistence on foundation, and the experience of freedom is an attempt to affirm this lack of foundation as a foundation itself, as an originary experience that is always beside itself. Such an affirmation would not be the constant worrying at the grounds for freedom or the deepening of the antinomies of freedom, but an experience, both of thought and beyond thought of trying to exist within this space of an originary lack of presence:

"A thought affirmative of this affirmation, a thought that would be neither the product of a dialectic nor the arbitrary prophecy of a subjectivity is what a logic of the experience of freedom must propose."[21]

Agamben's thinking of potentiality through figures such as Bartleby is an attempt to map this space of the groundless ground as the heart of all metaphysical thought. Agamben thinks this space in terms of language, in terms of the difference between the voice and language. The voice as expressive of things, and as expressive of the natural within the human does not coincide with language. There is always a discontinuity that passes from the natural expressiveness of the voice to its formulation in language. Agamben tries to affirm an experience of language which could reveal the expressive power of the word separated from its significations. He tries to articulate what he terms the "speechlessness" of language, an original expressive quality of words which is analogous to gesture rather than signification. He characterises this experience of language in the following way:

> "We walk through the woods: suddenly we hear the flapping of wings or the wind in the grass ... the dry leaves crackle as a snake slithers away. Not the encounter, but this flight of invisible animals is thought ...We came as close as possible to language, we almost brushed against it, held it in suspense: but we never reached our encounter."[22]

Agamben's difference from Nancy's account of the experience of freedom is an attempt at an immanent experience of dwelling in this interval between language and originary voice, to try and arrest this moment of the interval, a form of arrest

that he describes in terms of Bartleby's formula of potentiality. It is difficult to ultimately identify any difference here in their positions, but Agamben wants a destruction of any mystical authority in the negative ground of experience, in terms of an attempt to try and think how such a negative ground could be lived as a form of life. It is not enough for metaphysical thought to think that it can overcome the problems of its lack of grounding through a deepening of the experience of negativity. Agamben states that such an attempt to surpass the problem of the grounding of a metaphysical thought through a "simple repetition of its fundamental problem" is bound to lead to failure.[23] There is a turn here towards an attempt to delineate how such an experience of freedom could be lived. But what kind of life is this ? Bartleby's existence as a form of life as impotentiality is radical nothingness itself. Bartleby ends up dying through his inability to do anything, even feed himself. This is certainly a form of escape from the will, but in terms of a radical depersonalisation which ends in death. Agamben's argument as to the decay of experience suggests that the very process which produces bare life as an empty form of life that can be subject to the isolation and decision of what is living and what is dead, is also the experience that can move us beyond such a state, as this experience results in an awareness of our lack of identity with ourselves. The current dissolution of experience through the emptying of traditions and beliefs, the transformation of experience as Erfahrung to experience as Erlebnis, results in an opening, due to the very lack of a place in the world:

"Contemporary politics is this devastating *experimentum linguae* that all over the planet unhinges and empties traditions and beliefs, ideologies and religions, identities and communities. Only those who succeed in carrying it to completion - without allowing what reveals to remain veiled in the nothingness that reveals, but bringing language itself to language - will be the first citizens of a community with neither presuppositions nor a State ..."[24]

The injunction not to allow what reveals to remain veiled is an attempt to move Nancy's account of the experience of freedom into a thinking of the political, in the sense that the question of what it would mean for such an experience to exist as a politics becomes Agamben's question. But the passage to the political is impossible, because there is no account of how this experience of impotentiality is itself mediated by social and political forms, other than through the use of the example of "bare life". It is the strength of this paradigm of bare life that it leads to such an invocation of a wholly immanent existence, but its weakness lies in the fact that it converts itself into a pure transcendence. This tension is evident in Agamben's account of bare life as both a worrying political ontology of the present, in that the political forms of late modernity are full of examples of such a bare life, but also as the means by which a certain politics can take shape through a metaphysics of potentiality. In a recent critique of Agamben's State of Exception, Antonio Negri points to these two elements in Agamben's thought:

"There are in fact two Agambens. The one holding onto an existential, fated

and horrific background, who is forced into a continuous confrontation with the idea of death; the other seizing (adding pieces, manouvering and building) the biopolitical horizon through an immersion into philological labour and linguistic analysis ...The paradox is that these two Agambens always live together and, when you least expect it, the first re-emerges to darken the second, and the gloomy shadow of death spreads over and against the will to live, against the surplus of desire."[25]

Negri appears to be engaged in a form of wishful thinking in characterising the second Agamben as a philosopher of desire, since it is through a radical potentiality without actualisation, and as indetermination, that Agamben attempts to think a form of life that could escape bare life. However, this characterisation of redemption through an extreme desubjectification is the difficulty for Agamben's thought. This thinking of potentiality is indebted to Heidegger's thinking of the event as that which reveals the meaning of Being as a groundless ground. However, the problem for Agamben is in this fundamental ontology as politics. Agamben's politics is a fundamental metaphysico-politics which stands on unstable grounds. The complete lack of any thinking of history, or historical mediation results in a total indetermination of politics and metaphysics, that leaves us with no mediation between the figure of pure potentiality as a liminal experience in opposition to biopower and pure potentiality as liminal experience produced by biopower. This is the radical immanence of Agamben's political ontology, but it is an immanence which doesn't give any grounds for a politics or even an immanent

progression or realisation that isn't related to the actualisation of a potentiality that holds itself in reserve. This is perhaps why Agamben attempts a rapprochement with Deleuze's thought, at times, as it would give his political ontology a concept, such as virtuality, which would allow for a certain immanent realisation of politics which isn't related to the actualisation of possibility.

Adorno and the Negative Actualisation of Possibility

For Adorno, the Aristotelian concept of possibility is important as a corrective to the direction in which the relation between possibility, actuality and necessity has taken in Western metaphysical thought since Aristotle. Aristotle's conception of matter as pure possibility serves as a corrective to the migration of possibility into a concept of pure form in Kantian philosophy. The important corrective in Aristotle's formulation relates to the indissoluble something as the content of any thought, that we discussed in the last chapter. Aristotle's definition of matter as potentiality contains the thought that there can be no form without something as the ground for its synthesis. There must be a material there to be formed. Adorno outlines a tension in Aristotle's theory of matter as pure possibility, a tension which he will continue to trace in his account of freedom. He writes:

> "There is a curious tension and difficulty in the concept of ὕλη (matter) in Aristotle; on the one hand it is denigrated, disqualified, censured in every respect, including the moral, while on the other there is the remarkable

assumption whereby this element, though heterogeneous with regard to form, is endowed with a kind of animation, a tendency, even a certain kind of yearning."[26]

This account of matter as both inseparable from possibility and freedom is crucial for Adorno. His account of freedom will rely on a contradiction between a concept of possibility as pure form which has migrated into the transcendental subject, and an attempt to rescue this concept of matter as pure possibility, both as ground of freedom and heterogeneous to any kind of form.

Adorno doesn't have a positive concept of freedom, rather what he outlines is an "idea of freedom as the possibility of non-identity".[27] This idea of freedom as the possibility of non-identity has two elements, one that is experiential and one that is regulative. Both are related to possibility in the sense that the regulative idea of freedom provides a horizon which is impossible to communicate in the current reified context. The regulative idea of freedom is Adorno's concept of reconciliation, a reconciliation which would involve a form of relating between subject and object which would not involve the annexation of that which is alien to thought. This is the utopian horizon, it can be given no more content than this in the current context. The experiential element of freedom is the register within thought of something heterogeneous to thought and also constitutive for thought. Adorno wants to think the non-identical, and more radically to experience the non-identical, not only as heterogeneous to current conceptual categories but also as deeply related to them. This is not the construction of a pure exteriority, and

indeed, the argument that we traced in the last chapter concerning embodied thought shows that it cannot be a pure exteriority. Adorno`s thinking of the non-identical as possibility results from a deepening of the Kantian antinomies of freedom and causality.

Adorno`s philosophical understanding of freedom proceeds through an analysis of Kant's third antinomy in the Critique of Pure Reason. It will be useful briefly to outline this argument as it is crucial for Adorno's development of the theme. Kant proceeds in the antinomies by a statement of a thesis which is proved by showing that its antithesis leads to nonsense. Kant's first thesis is that there is an ultimate form of causality from which the causal chain in the natural world is derived. He proves this thesis through the critique of its antithesis, namely that the only causality in the world is that of the causal chain succeeding in an infinite regress according to rules in the natural world. Kant's argument here is that the causal chain as a whole needs a necessary beginning for it to be explained in terms of its own concept of causality, that every thing that appears presuppposes a preceding state which it inevitably follows according to a rule. There is no such preceding state for the causal chain as a whole, and therefore to salvage the principle of causality, there must be a transcendental originating activity, which generates the causal chain. This is the realm of transcendental freedom. As Adorno points out, what you have here, is freedom derived from the principle of causality as its necessary ground, an "astonishing expansion of the concept of causality to embrace the idea of freedom, so that freedom, too, is a causality, a causality *sui generis*".[28]

The other pole of the antinomy states the opposite thesis, that there is no freedom, and everything takes place in accordance with the laws of nature. Kant's argument here is that if we attempt to prove the antithesis of this statement, for example assuming that there is a freedom as originator of the causal series, then we postulate this freedom as an a priori category of thought, something that makes our experience possible. But if freedom is a category, then our experience will be chaotic, because freedom as the opposite of a conformity to law would be charged with providing the laws for the application of concepts to the objects of possible experience for the understanding. This would make the unity of experience impossible. Kant's conclusion from these two opposing theses is that they arise because thought is attempting to move beyond possible experience and thus gets enmeshed in these contradictions when trying to understand things such as the sufficient ground of a causal series.

Adorno's critique is that Kant's solution to the contradiction does not take the contradiction seriously enough. It is the very meaning of causality that pushes us towards these antinomic theses, not an inappropriate usage. If Kant wants a concept of causality to operate as an a priori category for the possibility of experience, then he cannot just wish away the problems that such a concept causes. Kant needs to return to this question in his moral philosophy in order to give an account of freedom of the will, and he does so by postulating a separation between the realm of knowledge and that of morality. Freedom and law become conjoined in a pure practical reason, in the form of the moral law. The moral law is formed through the only legitimate use of reason beyond experience in the

Kantian philosophy, and in this legitimate usage of reason beyond experience, we also arrive at a legitimate concept of freedom as the moral law which is not subject to any external conditions. For Adorno, the categorical imperative is this uncoupling of freedom from experience in a rigid refusal that anything material or affective should matter in morality:

> " ... the very strange coupling of freedom and law that is contained in the categorical imperative is arrived at in such a way that the principle of freedom should itself be nothing but reason, pure reason, and that it should not be subject to constraints by anything external, alien to it that is itself not rational."[29]

Adorno argues that this move in the moral philosophy institutes a form of freedom which is removed from the realm of experience and practice and thus tends to view anything that is external to it as an impingement on its operation. Furthermore, in its equation of freedom with law, it restricts the bounds for free choice far more than the concept of natural causality does in the third antinomy.

Adorno wants to return to the contradictions outlined in the third antinomy to see if they point towards an experience of freedom that is not compromised in the way that we see with the moral law. In Negative Dialectics, Adorno will attempt to deepen and inflect the Kantian antinomy of causality and freedom in order to open the possibility of a different and freer way of living, the "possibility to be another than one is".[30]

Adorno's analyses of concepts of freedom and causality stress the levels at which these concepts are enmeshed in relations between society, individual and nature, and it is not straightforward to disentangle a concept of freedom as possibility in opposition to necessity as conformity to law. When such polar concepts are postulated they tend to be false and tend to accord with the concept of identity. If we take the concept of causality, and its increasing indetermination as a concept in both science and society at large, this can be taken as an index of a growing realm of possibility and freedom within realms that were previously considered subject to rigorous laws and rules. However, to read this move away from a simple model of causation as necessarily increasing possibilities is to ignore the relation between society and concepts such as causality. For Adorno, the concept of causality has just relocated itself into the system itself:

> "Causality has withdrawn to totality, so to speak. Amidst its system it is no longer distinguishable. The more its concept heeds the scientific mandate to attenuate into abstractness, the less will the simultaneously ultra-condensed web of a universally socialised society permit one condition to be traced back with evidentiality to another condition."[31]

This is not praise for scientific reductionism, but the argument that developments in the understanding of causality have a certain relationship with the societal whole, and that the inability to trace an evidential ground through diffuse

informational codes and networks can have the effect of entrenching power, in the sense that the project of understanding becomes more abstract and complex.[32]

A deeper reflection on the causal principle pushes us to the thought of something that is not thought, that is beyond the realm of identifications. The attempt to trace back a series of thoughts in a causal chain inevitably pushes us to the limits of our identifications. In this sense, a reflection on causality leads to possibility because possibility lies in what is non-identical with thought. Therefore, in Adorno's thought, rather than an opposition between possibility and actuality, necessity and contingency, there is a deeper opposition between identity and non-identity. Reflection on causality can lead us to the possibility of non-identity and it is the possibility of non-identity that is freedom.

What does this mean ? The non-identical must be thought materially as that something which is both within thought (as the body) and therefore moves thought, but that is also heterogeneous to all attempts to identify it conceptually. So Adorno states that "if the hand no longer twitched, there would be no will".[33] The idea of freedom as the action of an individual without determining external factors, freely chosen in accordance with freely adopted motives, is challenged by Adorno:

> " ... what would be equally free is that which is not tamed by the 'I' as the principle of any determination"[34]

Freedom in this sense would be a relation with that which is non-identical to the 'I', which could be rationally and discursively presented, the communication of differentiation. According to Adorno's account of conceptuality, this is not currently possible, and would call for a change in the mode of production and organisation of society.

Nevertheless this concept of freedom as that which escapes the grasp of the subjective principle is an attempt to correct the equation in Kantian philosophy of possibility with the form of experience, rather than with its content. Adorno tries to think possibility equally as something that escapes all form and exists as a pure possibility without form, in Aristotelian terms. However, this pure possibility must register in experience in some way. This experience of possibility was outlined in the previous chapter in terms of the material registering of something other that is the result of a process of self-reflection. This leads us into attempting to formulate something that cannot be formulated, the absolutely other. In Adorno's lectures on metaphysics, he gives a number of determinations for this experience of the absolute other in theology. His reference point here is what he terms the "theology of crisis", and thinkers such as Karl Barth, who argued that the concept of metaphysics was becoming degraded in its association with cultural categories, and that what was needed was a restoration of dignity to the concept in terms of the absolute other. Adorno gives three different forms in which this absolute other can be characterised. First, it remains so indeterminate and abstract that it cannot relate. Second, it takes on the cultural determinants that are the subject of the initial critique, and, third, its content is summoned up from the

outside in a leap of faith. Adorno refuses to take up the challenge that this critique could pose to his own conception of the non-identical, and moves on to discuss how "lofty words" should not be used.[35] However, this difficulty of an experience that lies at the limits of experience but wants to describe itself as a moment of life certainly mirrors some of the problems that Adorno displaces on to the theology of crisis.

The problem for the concept of possibility is its link to any actualisation. Given the account of the dialectic of enlightenment which has stated that enlightenment reverts to myth, in the specific form of a human subjectivity which denies its life in order to preserve it, how can there be a possibility of that which is impossible in the current context, the experience of life itself? Adorno needs to give an account of possibility as openness to experience that is produced through a determinate negation of the false state of damaged life.

Philosophy and Music

Adorno's thinking of possibility as an experience at the limits of thought is marked by a contradictory imperative to move beyond the bounds of what it is able to say. This contradictory imperative is marked by the contradiction between the elements of communication and expression in all language. The element of truth within identity thinking lies in the aim of the thought to coincide with the meaning of the object, to name the object accurately, which is developed under a

compulsion to communicate the matter at hand, but this compulsion to communicate is always marked by a failure to completely identify; there is always a moment of non-identity. The form of thinking encapsulated by predicative subject-object thought fails to encapsulate this contradiction at the heart of language itself, and falsely attests to an experience of identification which eradicates the moment of non-identity. The attempt to construct a constellation is the attempt to gather series of concepts together to figure new relations between subject and object, which point towards the preponderance of objectivity. The experience of the dialectic is an experience analogous to that of composing music:

> "The reader is to float along, to let himself be borne by the current and not to force the momentary to linger ... On the other hand, the reader ... has to slow down the tempo at the cloudy places in such a way that they do not evaporate and their motion can be seen".[36]

Adorno is explicit about this connection between philosophical form and musical composition in his account of the relation of Hegel and Beethoven. There, he argues that the concept of a totality, which is an identity immanently produced through material mediated by nonidentity "is a law of artistic form transposed into the philosophical domain".[37]

Adorno's musical form is, of course, not Beethoven's, but Schoenberg's twelve-tone atonal music, which enables him to construct constellations of concepts in a

quite different compositional form. What is paradigmatic about the formal relation of the twelve tones is that none can dominate and one can only be repeated after the other eleven have been heard.[38] The clearest place that Adorno uses this form is in the twelve sections of the "Meditations on Metaphysics", which complete Negative Dialectics. The analogy of the relation of speculative metaphysics and music incorporates a notion of experience into the unfolding of the constellations themselves and the experience of their reception. The concept of experience that is left undetermined by Adorno, which can only be "concretised in its presentation", can also, even more radically, only be concretised in its reception and reformulation by the reader.[39] In his essay written in 1956 "On the Contemporary Relationship of Philosophy and Music", Adorno outlines the parallels and difference between philosophical language and musical expression.[40] The relation between philosophy and music is configured through the early Benjaminian idea of the Name. This theory is an explicitly theological theory of the Name, which argues that the function of proper names within language is to directly express the object being named. The name doesn't stand as a representation of the object but fits the object perfectly, the paradigm here being the act of creation as naming, as Benjamin states:

> "Man communicates himself to God through name, which he gives to nature and (in proper names) to his own kind, and to nature he gives names according to the communication he receives from her, for the whole of nature, too is imbued with a nameless, unspoken language, the residue of the creative

word of God, which is preserved in man as the cognizing name ..."[41]

In the language of name and thing, names and things immediately coincide in the act of creation. This model of naming provides Adorno with a utopian horizon for both the need within concepts, to fully identify the object as in names, and as a regulative ideal for all attempts at reconciliation between subject and object. However, Adorno's concept of reconciliation does become confused at times. Sometimes, he writes about a rational form of identity thinking, where the object would find its fulfillment in the word, or name that fits it perfectly. This model appears to refer to an identity between concept and object. However, Adorno, more often writes of reconciliation as not involving an annexation of what is alien to the concept, but a rational communication which would allow the object to be communicated as different. This form of reconciliation is not a fulfillment or a rational identity, but a new utopian horizon in terms of a reconciliation of subject and object which would still be a relation that was non-identical, but allowed the non-identical to be expressed rationally.

Let us consider this with regards to the relation between philosophy and music, because the analogies that Adorno draws here will illuminate some of the problems of interpretation that we attempted to deal with in the last chapter, primarily how the experience of an immersion in objects can be recuperated for a subjective, yet critical experience. In his essay on philosophy and music, he writes that:

"As language, music tends towards pure naming, the absolute unity of object and sign, which in its immediacy is lost to all human knowledge."[42]

Music is not imbued with the power of naming, but it can approach that power in an incomparable form because what the name intends to express is something without intention, and music, in both its resemblance to and its difference from language, has a particular relation to the expression of the "intentionless thing".[43] Music attempts to express this power of naming through the relation of form and content in each particular work, a relation that develops historically through the tradition of music and in response to historical and political changes beyond music. Adorno describes the relation between philosophy and music as follows:

"In the utopian and at the same time, hopeless attempts at naming, is located music's relation to philosophy, to which, for this very reason, it is incomparably closer, in its idea, than any other art ... But music does not know the name - the absolute as sound- immediately, but if one may express it this way, attempts its conjuring construction through a whole, a process".[44]

We saw earlier how Adorno's construction of constellations appropriates compositional technique as an analogy for the process of the configuration of conceptual materials in an attempt to open up the possibility of a different relation between the subject and object, which could more fully express the non-identical as non-identical. What I am interested in here is the model of

interpretation provided by music, as music provides a utopian model of an embodied interpretation in terms of performance. This model of interpretation is outlined in another essay, written in the same year, entitled "Music, Language and Composition".[45] Musical interpretation, in the fullest sense, is musical performance, a performance not conceived as a decoding of the language of music, but as an attempt at an embodied mimesis. The performance of a piece of music is always an interpretation, but an interpretation that attempts a coincidence between the performing and the musical notes, to the degree that that they could coincide. They would coincide not in terms of meaning or understanding, but in gesture. The coincidence of the bodily gesture of performance and the sign as musical note, would be the coincidence of name and object. It is still only an attempt in music, but as an attempt provides a utopian model of interpretation, an interpretation which is both free but rests with the particular objects at hand, namely the musical text.[46]

How do we relate this model to philosophical language ? The tension between a materiality of language that is expressive and the impulsion to communicate is mediated through the very form of presentation and never finally resolved. The experience of reading is the metaphysical experience that opens up the possibility that there may be other forms of thinking than those encapsulated by the logic of identity thinking. The presentation of concepts in constellational form aims to open up the antinomy between communication and expression at all times, for the purpose of opening up the possibility of different ways of relating to the world. But why does language resound with the material in the sense that Adorno gives

here ? The emphasis on the materiality of language is an attempt to dissever language from its significative function, and to demonstrate the expressive nature of language in itself. A turn to words as they exist as words attempts to think a way of using concepts that would not be purely significative. This project was unifying for Adorno, throughout his philosophical work, from the early "Theses on the Language of the Philosopher" through to his late works. The difference is that this thinking of the materiality of language becomes emphasised more and more as an element within an idea of form, rather than purely an aspect of the name, although the problem of the separation of form and content certainly informs even his earliest work.[47] The thinking of the materiality of language and its relation to an idea of form, is the thinking of this materiality as opening up a space for the materiality of objects themselves as mattering within thought, and of thought itself as an embodied thought. The concentration on words as words doesn't serve to invoke a theological aspect of naming as creation, but blocks the significative aspect of words. Therefore, rather than the idea of naming as an orignary archetype indicated by the materiality of words, it would be better to think this emphasis on words as something blocking their representational content and thus pointing to everything they fail to represent, which perhaps they could express. Musical interpretation is a utopian model because it does not proceed through understanding, but through the embodied immersion in the musical material. That which reverberates in the space of language is not the things themselves but the echo of the things themselves. This is the tension between the concept of the name and its transposition into a secular concept of the materiality of language.

Adorno and Agamben write about the materiality of language in very similar ways, because they share a certain common heritage in Benjamin's theory of the Name. What Agamben terms the "woody substance of language" serves as a means of separating language from its representational power, in an attempt to open up the possibility of a different way of living within language, which through the emphasis on its materiality, attempts to point to its dependence on objectivity.[48] However, the immersion in objects is conceived differently by both Adorno and Agamben. Fundamentally, the immersion in the materiality of language or the attempt through constellations to construct a form which would not suppress particularity, is for Adorno an attempt to open up the possibility of the non-identical, which is the possibility of life, of something ineliminably natural within the human subject. Agamben conceives this immersion into objectivity as also producing a limit as possibility, but this limit opens up a space that Agamben often terms the interval, and a messianic time, which reveals a possibility that is fundamentally dislocated from any materialism, but is the thinking of an absence at the heart of thought. It is this space that Agamben wants to think of as a space of a form of life, but what kind of life is this?

Transcendence and Immanence

In his essay, "Immanence: A Life ...", Deleuze attempts to think the category of a life distinct from any subject position or relation to an object, and he does this

through an initial characterisation of a life that appears before the moment of death:

> "Between his life and his death, there is a moment that is only that of a life playing with death ...The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens: a "Homo tantum", with whom everyone empathises and who attains a sort of beatitude".[49]

Deleuze takes this moment from a fictional episode in Dickens's Our Mutual Friend, but he does not want to limit the apprehension of a life, as something that only appears at the instant of death.[50] Deleuze argues that this life is everywhere, but cannot be actualised in a moment, but only as something "between-times, between-moments".[51] For Agamben, this essay of Deleuze's is important because it outlines a form of life as absolute immanence. This form of life as absolute immanence is related by Agamben to the idea of an "immanent cause", a subject who can conceive of itself, at the same time as both active and passive. Such a concept of immanent cause would be a life lived in a moment of life which had no distinction between possibility and actuality, or subject and object. Agamben writes of it in terms of Deleuze's characterisation of the immanence of desire to itself.[52] This immanence of desire to itself is neither a lack of desire nor the otherness of desire, but "desire's self-constitution as desiring".[53] Agamben

understands this formulation in relation to his conception of potentiality as something that preserves itself as potentiality. This is an attempt to construct an ontology which does not rest in either a complete fullness of Being or a complete absence of Being, but tries to exist in the space between these two ideas. The difficulty for Agamben is that his conception of the meaning of Being still exists within the register of something that attempts a project or process of grounding. Therefore, his attempt to transcribe a Deleuzian ontology of vital differentiation leads him to try and think this concept within the domains of a concept of potentiality rather than a virtual becoming. Agamben's appropriation of Deleuze's concept of life sees its indetermination as an ontological problem for the existence of human life, rather than an ontological fact for life as a whole. His understanding of what Deleuze means by life as "composed of virtuality" is that this is a life whose pure potentiality coincides with its Being.[54] The concept of the virtual is intimately related to the concept of life, in that the virtual belongs to an understanding of life as involved in a creative and complex evolutionary process which doesn't determine its outcome. The virtual is thus "real" in that it is a process of becoming within life itself, but it is never actual in the sense that it is purely realised in an isolated entity. Furthermore, there is no fixed identity to a body or a subject which can determine a discrete location for a force, action or event. There is just a context of flux and infinite becoming.[55] The ontology at play in the concept of the virtual is an ontology that does not delimit or determine any originary beginning, but rather a process of originary differentiation, so that the virtual can be read at a number of different ontological levels. As opposed to the

possible, then, the virtual does not consist in either a completely negative determination of possibility, which states that there are no obstacles which cannot be surpassed, or a positive concept of possibility which logically argues for the idea that there are pre-existent possibles, that any event could be foreseen given its necessary conditions.[56] Agamben's thinking of the absolute immanence of a life as the coincidence of a pure potentiality with Being attributes too static a formulation to the virtual in its transcription into potentiality. Agamben's thought still remains within the bounds of the Kantian third antinomy, in attempting to think this absolute immanence as an immanent cause. There is no "plane of immanence" in Agamben's philosophy just this relation of pure potentiality and Being, a relation that he attempts to think as an affirmative experience of a relation to Being which is the lack of grounding for any human subjectivity. The affirmative element to this is this thinking of pure potentiality, but pure potentiality has no content other than an exhaustion, an inability to realise itself, a hesitancy.

Agamben reads this as a form of thinking which thinks itself, and in doing so thinks a pure potentiality, which is neither a complete emptiness or an object, but just the potentiality to think or not to think. This attempt at a form of experience between the experience of an object and the experience of nothing, still does not delineate of what this is an experience. Gillian Rose has written that "ontology cannot admit ... that the subject has any actual experience", and Agamben`s attempt to stake a space for experience as pure possibility confirms this critique.[57] This form of life as pure potentiality may be beyond the grasp of any form of power,

but as an account of life, it gives no material content to such a life, and no means for this life to move beyond a "life that does not live". In a sense, as Alexander Düttmann has pointed out, this experience of pure potentiality cannot confirm itself as pure potentiality in the way that Agamben wants it to, because then it would have to refuse the hesitancy intrinsic to the experience of a potentiality that refuses to actualise itself. Düttmann makes the point that if one could exist in the state of pure potentiality, then there would be no experience of the hesitant, and therefore pure potentiality as an achieved state can only be conceived in a deconstructive reading as both possible and impossible, in that the experience of an achieved state of hesitancy is difficult to characterise.[58]

Agamben's concept of pure potentiality as form of life attempts an immanent interpretation of a life that refuses to actualise itself as life, that remains within a position of pure actuality. At a formal level, this conception is not too far from Schopenhauer's conception of the denial of the will to live. For Schopenhauer, the denial of the will to live is the moment of freedom produced by a contemplative attitude of the subject, which separates itself from the will to live, as the unifying will of both subjects and objects.[59] For Schopenhauer, this separation from the will to live results from a changed knowledge that can be produced by a heightened reflection, aesthetic experience, or the experience of bodily suffering or compassion with the suffering of others. Schopenhauer talks of the result of this changed form of knowledge in terms of the "universal quieter of volition".[60] This process of the denial of the will to live results in an "entire suppression of character".[61]

The results of this experience cannot be affirmed or given any concrete characteristics, as Schopenhauer states, it is a "passing away into empty nothingness".[62] The denial of the will to life removes the thinking subject from the realm of a will to life which destroys life itself, but in this removal there is no form of resistance to life, because life is pure emptiness itself. Thus, Schopenhauer writes of submitting to the will of the other as an exercise that increases freedom in terms of the denial of the will to live. Schopenhauer refers to this in religious terms: "For precisely what the Christian mystics call the work of grace and the new birth, is for us the single direct expression of the freedom of the will".[63] This single expression of freedom consists in a denial of the will to live. There is a reversal here, in terms of an absolute immanence that finds itself as a pure and empty transcendence. The attempt to delineate the features of a singular life that could escape the grasp of power results in a life within which no signs of life can be distinguished, a complete exhaustion of life.

Chapter Eight: Redemption and Reconciliation

The possibility of an experience that lies at the limits of experience, yet remains an experience of something, rather than just an emptiness of experience, requires that Adorno give some material content to the contradiction implicit in his concept of the possibility of metaphysical experience. The contradiction results from the reality of a reified experience which is so complete that an experience beyond such a reified whole can only be configured in transcendent terms as a metaphysical experience. Such a metaphysical experience, though, cannot be constructed as a standpoint beyond or outside society, but only through the determinate negation of the current false state of things. Adorno, furthermore, disavows any fundamental ontological starting point from which to criticise the false whole. The process of a determinate negation of the current society results in an experience at the limits of possibility, an experience which is transcendent to the possibility of experience given the current formation of subjectivity within capitalist society. Adorno needs an account of the experience of possibility that holds itself in suspension between an actual experience, which is impossible, given the current structures of society, and a purely possible experience that is never actualised, which would then dissolve into an emptiness of experience. A purely possible experience that is not brought into consciousness cannot be called experience.

Metaphysical experience is linked to the possibility of life as it is only at the margins of experience that a form of life not totally subsumed by the structures of capitalist society can be found. This presumes that at a certain point in the process of a disintegration of reified experience, a breakthrough occurs immanently as a result of a dialectical process of the deepening of contradictions , which then results in an experience that is tied to materiality. For Adorno, this is an experience of life, but an experience of life in its deadened form. This is the importance of Benjamin's account of the allegorical for Adorno. In the allegory, the observer is presented with a vision of the natural world as petrified, deadened. Such an experience of the present is, at the same time, a painful protest, an experience of shock and horror at the dissolution of subjectivity, but a dissolution that has in this negative experience a moment of awakening to possibilities. Rather than conceiving this awakening in relation to the point between sleep and consciousness, or through thinking of dream states and waking states, one could see this as a philosophy of exhaustion. Only at a point of exhaustion in the dialectical contradictions is the experience of possibility registered in the utterance of the exhausted metaphysical experience, "is that all?". This is the form of revelation within the breakthrough of the present moment, but it can only exist as such in relation to what has gone before and what is to come. The process is one of exhaustion of the contradictions of experience itself. This is not therefore an affirmative concept of potentiality, but an opening to the possibility of the future, the possibility that things might be altered.

However, there is still a question as to why this dissolution does not remain only a dissolution. The experience of dissolution itself becomes the experience of an openness constitutive of possibility, that things might be different. The grounding for the rescue of such an experience lies in Adorno's complex and confusing uses of the concepts of redemption and reconciliation. My interpretation of these two concepts and their interrelation will serve as a means of questioning the possibility of metaphysical experience. I will begin this chapter by exploring a critique of Adorno's concept of redemption as outlined by Agamben in his book The Time that Remains. Such a critique will lead me on to an interpretation of Adorno's concept of redemption as a negative redemptive experience, an experience that does not fulfill or rescue that which is forgotten, but that reveals in an explosive moment of time, a deadened and unreconciled experience. However, such a moment of negative redemption, because of its unfulfilled nature gives an image in reverse of the possibility of reconciliation, a reconciliation which lies not in a unity of subject and object, but in the experience of their non-identity. This negative redemptive moment serves as a vacuum which dissolves subjectivity of its rigidity as ego, but at the same time illuminates the world as a deadened existence, as the possibility of a constructed eternal; capitalism itself as eternity constructed in a transient mode. The stasis of the negative redemptive time serves as a mirror for the stasis of society, but at the same time, arrests the process of decay, even for a moment. This arrest provides a perspective from which the possibility of reconciliation can be viewed in negative terms. This process is one of a bodily exhaustion, and it is in a number of different figures of the exhausted

that I want to read a series of experiences that will conjoin redemption and reconciliation in differing ways. Rather than reading Adorno's concepts of reconciliation and redemption as either a privileging of one term over the other, or a theological gesture, I will attempt to put into play, through an interrogation of figures of exhausted life, certain contradictions in the way these figures relate to the concept of metaphysical experience. In this way, I hope to give an account of the concepts of redemption and reconciliation that does not rely on a single aphorism, or theoretical construction within Adorno's work, but remains faithful to the contradictions implicit within any attempt at thinking metaphysical experience. Having said that, my guiding interpretation here is that a purely theological or aesthetic reading of Adorno`s concept of redemption is mistaken, and a reading of the concept of reconciliation as a unity of subject and object is also fundamentally mistaken.[1]

Redemption and Reconciliation

Agamben's critique of Adorno's aphorism on redemption begins by citing an argument by Jacob Taubes. Taubes writes that Adorno's concept of a standpoint of redemption results in a gesture of an "as if" taken towards the possibility of redemption that results in an aestheticisation of redemption. Such an aestheticisation results in the ultimate indifference to the possibility of redemption itself contained in Adorno`s statement that whether redemption actually occurs "itself hardly matters".[2] Taubes argues that Adorno refuses an affirmative concept

of redemption, because of his reliance on aesthetics, and particularly music, as the only place for salvation within a fallen humanity.[3] However, as I argued in the previous chapter, music serves as a model of reconciled practice that never finally achieves a salvation. Music is not redemptive, but some of its forms serve as a model of reconciliation. Redemption is not, therefore, perceived as an aesthetic elevation of a standpoint differentiated from the world, but as an attempt to think the possibility of something that might be different from the current status quo. The modernist art work itself proceeds through its own decayed forms to present a model of the destruction of experience through its lack of an affirmation of art's ineffability or dignity. Taubes's accusation of a straightforward aestheticisation fails to articulate how such an aestheticisation becomes an immanent construction of an image of the destruction of experience within modernity. Aestheticisation does not presume a position outside or removed from society. However, it does presume that redemption is not possible.

Agamben proposes a reading of Adorno's aphorism at the end of Minima Moralia alongside the first lines of Negative Dialectics. The reason why the standpoint of redemption must remain an "as if" is because philosophy has missed the opportunity to realise itself. Redemption is impossible because philosophy has missed the moment for its realisation.[4] The reduction of the concept of redemption results from this analysis that there was a moment in history for philosophy to realise itself, in Marxist terms, as an actuality, to change the world, but this possibility has been missed. However, Agamben's reading of these two passages together does not take into account that the failure of philosophy to realise itself

is not a failure of redemption, but of a fulfillment of the promises of philosophy. The actualisation of philosophy relates to a concept of a fulfilled philosophy in actuality. What I will argue is that this failure does not call forth redemption, but a necessity for a new concept of reconciliation, which does not lie in completion or fulfillment. It is not that the failure of philosophy to realise itself results in an invocation of a standpoint of redemption that is impossible, but that it calls for a changed concept of reconciliation, which in the current reified context can only be outlined through a negative experience of redemption. For Agamben, the key modality for Adorno's whole work becomes a modality of impotenitality. This mode of impotentiality results in a fundamentally non-Messianic thought, because ultimately Adorno does not see any grounds for the recuperation of that which has been absolutely lost and forgotten. A true thought of redemption would emphasise the "unforgettable" as an exigency within thought that can never materialise other than through a redemptive gathering of time. Thus, Agamben argues that: "Despite its appearance, negative dialectics is a thought which is absolutely not messianic", and because of its inability to think the redemptive moment other than an "as if" it becomes a form of "ressentiment" in Nietzsche's terms, a philosophy which punishes itself through its refusal to affirm any form of redemption.[5] For Agamben, the conclusion of Minima Moralia serves as the final seal of such a "ressentiment", because the whole attempt at a reflection from damaged life without the possibility of redemption reduces philosophy to the ethical justification of such a resentment at life.

The messianic, for Agamben, is not a "standpoint", but the dissolution of any subjective position which could look on and regard the world from a position "as if" something had or were taking place. That which is redeemed is the absolutely fallen spirit, as that which can only be saved when it is absolutely lost.[6] Agamben's thinking relates the experience of potentiality as to the experience of a Messianic time, a "time that remains". The Messianic time is the time of this remnant that holds itself as potentiality withdrawn from everyday temporality awaiting its completion in the time of redemption. The messianic time is a time that "contracts itself and begins to finish".[7] Messianic time, is therefore, a time that holds itself in a space between chronological time and the time of redemption. It is the time that is waiting for its fulfillment as redemptive time. However, in a characteristic move, Agamben attempts to think this not as pure deferment, but as the time of a certain achievement, the time that it takes for us to achieve a representation of time, which would not be a spatial representation in terms of the chronological time of the instant, or a historical time of past, present and future, but a representation that would be adequate to the end of time in the time of redemption. Agamben's concept of messianic time is explicitly dependent on Benjamin's conception of a time that can both interrupt and open up the possibility of a completion of history. This gesture at completion is not a completed redemption, but a perspective on redemption that occurs within the historical as the insight into the completion of the historical in the time of redemption. However, it is difficult to understand what this redemption as the

completion of history could be here, whether thought in terms of the Name, or in terms of the completion of historical time in the time of redemption.

The opposite critique from the one offered by Agamben has also been targeted at Adorno's concept of redemption. This critique argues that Adorno smuggles in a theological notion of redemption which reduces the force of an emphasis on the immanent context. The standpoint of redemption can therefore only be thought as either a regulative ideal, or more esoteric form of the phenomenological epoché, an injunction to adopt a voluntary position or induce oneself into a state of observation from a redemptive standpoint.[8] Adorno's invocation of such a theological concept is read as a refusal of the logic of immanence implicit within his philosophical methodology of a dialectic without sublation.

What both these critiques, from different extremes, miss is that Adorno's concept of redemption is a negative, secularised concept of the redemptive. This is its "as if", or semblance character. It is certainly not the adoption of a position outside of society, but the attempt to construct within the immanent constraints of possible experience, the revelation of such an experience as a form of damaged life. The standpoint of redemption is a constructed experience, not an adopted posture. It is the result of a process of negative dialectics, not the initiating presupposition. Redemptive concepts thus take on a negative hue when used by Adorno. The temporality of the standpoint of redemption is a stasis, an arrest of time, but in its arresting of time it does not fulfil time, but mirrors the eternal arrest of change within capitalist society. It reveals the supposedly transient as the same. Adorno's temporality of breakthrough relates to a certain heightening of an instant of time

that dissolves subjectivity, but the dissolution of subjectivity is only an instant, it doesn't complete time or fill out time. In fact, it returns the subject to a time that appears even more the empty succession of chronological time. The moment of the shattering of experience, whether through an achieved aesthetic experience, or through the chance coming together of different elements of experience is an experience that separates the ego from its drive for self-preservation which has sedimented itself as the formal principle of reason. However, no one can live in such a state, but the return from such a dissolution results in an exhaustion, which points to the recognition that there is more than just the reified context and things could be different.

The concept of a remnant that is saved within a Messianism is inflected through an experience of the waste or remains of a life itself. The remnant that is saved in Messianic time is not that which is eternal and unforgettable, opposed to the contingent, but the remnants or ruins of life itself. The remnant cannot be thought as something unforgettable, yet irrecoverable other than in the time of redemption, but only as that exigency which remains as life within the subject, as that which is transient and could be lost. Adorno's thinking of this loss is thus far more pessimistic than a thinking of the unforgettable, as it is the possibility of losing something that precisely cannot be redeemed. Agamben writes of the unforgettable as an exigency that exists within thought, that cannot be recovered or return to experience, or even manifest itself in the register of a return of the repressed. That which is lost, yet unforgettable, can only be redeemed not remembered. For Adorno, the exigency within thought is not the unforgettable but

the non-identical, and that which is non-identical is not irreparably lost to thought, but suppressed and dominated by thought as identity thinking. The negative moment of redemption, in terms of a form of looking towards the past, is the revelation of all that has been lost, and that is beyond redemption. Furthermore, the redemptive moment is not of the spirit, but a bodily exhaustion. Such a bodily exhaustion pre-figures certain moments that open up the possibility of a different form of life within the subject.

However, the possibilities opened up by different forms of exhaustion relate in fundamentally different ways to Adorno's concept of reconciliation. Reconciliation does not lie in a move beyond subject and object, but in a form of cognition and a state of society which could allow a relationship between subject and object that would not be dominating. Adorno describes it in the following terms:

> "Reconcilement would release the non-identical, would rid it of coercion, including spiritualised coercion; it would open the road to the multiplicity of different things and strip dialectics of its power over them. Reconcilement would be the thought of the many as no longer inimical, a thought that is anathema to subjective reason."[9]

Reconciliation in terms of both reason and society, would be that state in which what was alien to thought and identification remains in its difference in thought. This would be a different model of fulfilled experience. This fulfillment does not lie in completion, or even rational identification, in the sense of a completed

coincidence of subject and object. Error, fallibility, the fact that thought fails in its identifications, would all still be the marks of a reconciled society, but these would be constitutive characteristics of a rational experience itself.

The negative experience of a form of redemption opens up the possibility of reconciliation, in the sense that the lack of completion and fulfillment in a negative experience of redemption can give us a weak image of reconciliation. This image of reconciliation would be that, which in its incompletion, would appear as incomplete, and enable a form of experience which could rest with such an incompletion. Willem Van Reijen has argued that redemption is figured as the vanishing point of reconciliation.[10] What he means by this, is that the redemptive moment ceases to be figured other than as a miniscule moment of fulfillment that can be understood through the concept of reconciliation. My interpretation is the opposite. The negative experience of redemption opens up the possibility of reconciliation, through its negative reflection of the lack of fulfillment and openness within a certain exhausted experience. Such an experience figures reconciliation as its vanishing point in two ways. First, the revelation of the world as that which is dead, both within the subject and without, dissolves the imperialism of subjectivity as the empty form which trusts in its own ability to completely identify the object. Second, the realisation of its own fallibility, error and dependence on objectivity opens up the possibility of a different form of living. This possibility can be related to the impotentiality that Agamben refers to as the predominant modality in Adorno's thinking.

Agamben takes this concept of impotentiality from a modality elucidated by the anthropologist Benjamin Whorf, in his writing on Hopi Indian linguistics.[11] Whorf writes of three forms of the impotential. One refers to a modality which changes an event that will happen to an event that "tries to" happen, so the "girl will dance" is changed to "the girl tries to dance".[12] Second, when the impotential is related to the past, it will refer to an event that was expected but never occurred, a frustrated attempt. Third, there is the form of the impotential which relates to a theoretical possibility in the past that has never occurred, or never yet occurred. These forms of impotentiality occur throughout Adorno`s work, but are primarily important as forms of metaphysical experience that relate to a concept of reconciliation, not redemption. The impotential, then, relates to the changed concept of reconciliation of which we have given an account above.

Reconciliation as the vanishing point of a negative experience of redemption is produced in a series of figures of exhaustion. It is through an account of certain figures of exhaustion, particularly as bodily exhaustion, that Adorno wants to relate the possibility of an experience that will open up the subject in its dissolution to its own conditionality. This is an opening that can figure either reconciliation or extreme degradation. However, this is the true demand of the negative redemptive experience, in that it figures the possibility of reconciliation, and this is why the demand that thought must comprehend its "own impossibility for the sake of the possible", supersedes any invocation of the reality of redemption. The demand of thought to comprehend its own impossibility proceeds through an experience of "consummate negativity" which can become the "mirror image of its opposite".[13]

But how precisely does this consummate negativity, this experience of the impossible produce possibility ? It is far from guaranteed. But through an examination of certain figures or modes of exhaustion, we can explore the relationship between concepts of reconciliation, redemption, possibility and impossibility, to try and articulate what Adorno's concept of a metaphysical experience means.

Figures of Exhaustion

1. Beckett.

In an essay on Beckett's work entitled "The Exhausted" Gilles Deleuze elucidates several forms of exhaustion within Beckett's work.[14] The figure of the exhausted relates to an exhaustion of possibility. The difference between tiredness and exhaustion, for Deleuze, is characterised by a different relation to possibility. The tired person is tired through an inability to realise a particular possibility, whereas the exhausted person exhausts the possible itself: "He exhausts himself in exhausting the possible, and vice-versa. He exhausts that which, in the possible, is not realised."[15] In this exhaustion, there is nothing left to realise, only the nothingness that lies at the end of an exhaustive series of possibilities. What Beckett combines, for Deleuze, is:

> " ... a keen sense or science of the possible, joined or rather disjoined with a fantastic decomposition of the self ... the greatest exactitude and the most

extreme dissolution: the indefinite exchange of mathematical formulations and the pursuit of the formless or unformulated. These are two meanings of exhaustion, and both are necessary in order to abolish the real."[16]

The question raised by Beckett's figures of exhaustion is how through such a dissolution of subjectivity alongside the exhaustion of the real, a space for a thinking of possibility itself can be opened up by the exhaustion of actual possibilities. For Adorno, such an exhaustion opens up possibility because the experience of Beckett's works reveals the loss of subjectivity and the lack of experience in modernity and thus negatively images the possibility that something else might happen. There is a closeness between an idea of freedom as the possibility of nonidentity and an exhausted humanity that would be just a deadened form of the nonidentical. Adorno writes that: "Nonidentity is both the historical disintegration of the unity of the subject and the emergence of something that is not itself subject".[17] However, this nonidentity can be both freedom or hell, dependent on the form in which such a disintegration of the subject occurs, which determines what emerges as that which is not subject. Beckett's play Endgame delineates the closeness of a thinking of reconciliation and death, as a state of complete peace, a state of indifferentiation which does not allow for any thinking of the nonidentical or the subject.

This negative image of life serves as a outline of its defects, in the form of a negative ontology. What Beckett presents in Endgame serves as an image of false life which the audience can recognise as its own life. It can reflect the possibility

that such a presentation of an eternal time is therefore actually a constructed one and could therefore be changed. The exhaustive series of combinations that Beckett presents in his plays and novels (for example, the different combinations of sucking stones in Molloy, the exhaustion of a language in repeated and meaningless forms, and the reduced space and temporality of the plays which take place in a no-man's land) all present the paradoxical idea that there is no content to life any longer, other than one of abstract domination. However, this purely immanent exhaustion of possibilities for life within works such as Endgame opens up the critical thought that, in this exhaustion, there may be a glimpse or a possibility that things could be altered, as Adorno writes:

> "The immanent contradiction of the absurd, the nonsense in which reason terminates, opens up the emphatic possibility of something true that cannot even be conceived of anymore. It undermines the absolute claim of the status quo, that which simply is the way it is. Negative ontology is the negation of ontology: it was history alone that produced what the mythical power of the timeless and eternal has appropriated".[18]

The question posed by Endgame is whether, in the immanent context of such a reduction of life, there can be any possibility of a reconciliation or redemption which can be disentangled from such an absolute domination. The need for a new concept of reconciliation results from the similarity between the end state of humanity as depicted in the play, and the time of absolute peace in a traditional

concept of reconciliation. Adorno describes Hamm's hankering after such an end state as a time of peace, in which all could be stillness and there would be no endless, repetitive and exhausted series of possibilities. However, the figure of exhaustion in Beckett precludes a time of peace or rest. The point at which the end comes becomes an endlessly vanishing moment, as beyond words, there is not silence, but voices, gestures, breaths themselves. Beckett's works give the lie to any easy concept of a reconciliation of life, as Adorno writes:

> "The Old Testament "dust thou shalt become" is translated into: filth. Excretions become the substance of a life that is death. But the imageless image of death is an image of indifference, that is, a state prior to differentiation. In that image the distinction between absolute domination - the hell in which time is completely confined within space, in which absolutely nothing changes any more - and the messianic state in which everything would be in its rightful place, disappears. The last absurdity is that the peacefulness of the void and the peacefulness of reconciliation cannot be distinguished from one another".[19]

Such an insight demands a concept of reconciliation that is not a unity of subject and object in an achieved indifference or a prior indifference, but a concept of reconciliation that is constructed as the experience of a form of rationality that would be constituted by its failure to completely identity, by error and fallibility. It is through a second figure of exhaustion, that of happiness, that Adorno reads this concept of reconciliation.

2. Proust and Happiness.

Adorno's characterisation of metaphysical experience relates to the future in terms of happiness, an experience that he characterises in Proustian terms in the form of the promise of the place name:

> "One thinks that going there would bring the fulfillment, as if there were such a thing. Being really there makes the promise recede like a rainbow. And yet one is not disappointed ... what it takes to form this universal, this authentic part of Proust's presentation, is to be entranced in one place without squinting at the universal."[20]

The important insight here is not necessarily the experience of the promise of happiness and its inevitable failure, it is the model of experience contained in the happiness of the place-name itself, which means that the disappointment is not experienced when the place does not fulfill the requirements hoped for. This is undoubtedly a model of transcendence, experience as transcendence, but it is distinctive metaphysically in that it is related to experiences rather than intellectual intuitions. In his essays on Ernst Bloch's work, Adorno gives more content to this experience of a lack of fulfillment, as the experience of an opening to a different possibility of relating to the world. In his essay on Bloch's Spirit of Utopia, Adorno relates the "early experience" of reading the text at the age of seventeen as a metaphysical experience itself, which connects with both the presentation and

the content of Bloch's writings. This experience is described as an "amazement". This amazement is occasioned by the form of the writing as much as the content, and a certain intensity of temporality in the reading. The speeded up tempo of the text expresses the attempt at a breakthrough in every line of the text, and it challenges any attempt to peacefully contemplate the object at hand, constantly jolting the reader on to the next sentence. This reflects the content of the work, which Adorno conceives as a rediscovery of an original motivation within philosophy, that of an amazement, but turned not towards the Platonic Idea, but to the "individual things". What is discovered from this attention freed from convention, is less important than the act itself. It is the act of experience changed through an interpretation that produces the model of experience not its fulfillment.[21] In his essay on Bloch's Spuren, Adorno refers to the childhood experience that Bloch elucidates of a feeling that, amidst the everyday world, "there is something going on", which cannot be easily accessed. The remembrance of such a feeling in adulthood, a feeling analogous to the one of amazement we just mentioned, brings about a negative inflection of such a metaphysical experience in terms of a reflection on current life, revolving around the phrase, "is that all" ? The division of happiness into a happiness that is close and fulfilled, and a sublimation of a happiness in a heightened, sublimated form as something elevated beyond the material (a division which Adorno attributes to Goethe) is forced back together in Bloch's writing and in metaphysical experience itself.[22] Happiness comes from investing hope in the mundane everyday and transforming into something it is not, but could be. This happiness cannot be adequately

represented or discursively communicated, as the very structure of an experience of happiness is that, when one is in a state of happiness it is impossible to know. Happiness is only recovered through memory. Thus, Adorno writes:

> "To happiness the same applies as to truth: one does not have it but is in it ... He who says he is happy lies, and in invoking happiness, sins against it. He alone keeps faith who says: I was happy."[23]

The problem with Bloch's philosophy is that he turns these experiences into the elements of a metaphysical system, and thus betrays their particularity. Adorno argues that the particular is ultimately sacrificed to a moment of breakthrough and a utopia, and thus the metaphysical experience becomes absolutised in its relation to redemption.

What would be a breakthrough that didn't turn itself into an absolute ? Adorno tries to think this in terms of the Proustian place-name or the childhood experience of amazement, experiences that are fundamentally unfulfilled and cannot be fulfilled, so the breakthrough is then turned back negatively and reflected on to the contemporary situation from which it emerges. The breakthrough is not a transcendent bursting of the bonds of immanence, but a form of transcendence which immediately reflects back onto the current reified context. These breakthroughs are often configured as changes in the lived experience of temporality, but these are not permanent changes in temporal experience, or even glimpses of a world beyond, but a slight shift of the immanent context. These

changes in temporality can be oriented towards the past or the future depending on the particular experience involved. For example, Adorno writes of the déjà vu which can open up the possibility of a different relation towards the past, and the experience of a "fruitless waiting", which both lengthens a certain lived experience of time in the moment of the waiting, and in its fruitlessness disarms the subject in two ways. First, to wait fruitlessly causes a reflection on what was waited for, and the whole process of why the thing waited for was given such worth and dignity in the first place. Thus, the experience causes a reflection on the process of desire and how that desire is being constructed. The second moment, in the experience of fruitless waiting, is that in this reflection the subject realises that this is a model for experience as a whole, a waiting for something to happen that never does, which causes the question of "is that all ?". This triggers a reflection on what experience is and could be, and that this fallible experience could open the possibility for a form of experience which didn't model itself on the concept of a possession or a fulfillment.

Such an experience is an exhaustion because all that is hoped for and invested in the place-name fails to actualise itself in the reality of the visit. The experience of "is that all ?", or the hopeful yet disappointed waiting empties out subjectivity, yet opens it to the possibility of a life that is marked not by a dominating fullness, but by an exaggeration, a constant missing of the mark. This experience has its confirmation in the form of a construction of constellations of concepts which in the gaps that they create between identifying judgements, aim to create a model of experience which is not fulfilled or able to be fulfilled. This is a

model for a life lived, not in the enumeration of its successes, but in the awareness that a life completes its course only in a deviation from its original premises. Such a deviation though is still a loss, in that it marks the impossibility of the identification aimed at in the form of the judgement. But the failure (indeed, impossibility) of such an identification, opens itself to the possibility of that which is non-identical with thought. In Minima Moralia, Adorno writes that:

> "If a life fulfilled its vocation directly, it would miss it. Anyone who dies old and in consciousness of seemingly blameless success, would secretly be the model schoolboy who reels off all life's successes without gaps or omissions, an invisible satchel on his back. Every thought which is not idle, bears branded on it the impossibility of its full legitimation, as we know in dreams that there are mathematics lessons, missed for the sake of a blissful morning in bed, which can never be made up."[24]

The title of this aphorism is "Gaps". It is through these gaps in experience, that the possibility of reconciliation via a lack of completion and fulfillment can be figured, but only in a negative form as the result of a certain exhaustion of experience that is not disappointment or failure, but, in its loss, opens itself to something in life not encapsulated in the form of an identifying judgement.

3. Kafka and Gesture.

In his essay on Kafka, Adorno emphasises the particularity of details within the works, details which protude and are immediately incommensurable with any greater meaning. Adorno's intention is to deflect an immediately symbolic reading of Kafka's texts in terms of an existentialist drama of an individuality fatefully existing in an absurd universe. The particularity that most captures Adorno's attention in Kafka's texts is the emphasis on gestures, both linguistic and non-linguistic. Adorno describes a certain characteristic linguistic gesture of Kafka's in the form of the parable. Kafka's writing often functions through a parable which has no key to interpretation. The sentences affirm an emphatic meaning which when interrogated fails to appear. In this sense, they are analogous to a linguistic gesture, a statement such as "that is the way it is" which dissolves when the interpreter attempts to decode it. The parable without a key for its interpretation exhausts all meaning in its emphatic presentation as indecipherable linguistic gesture.[25] This linguistic gesture is punctuated by a whole series of bodily gestures and physiognomies that are clearly delineated but hard to understand. There are the figures such as the metamorphosis of Gregor Samsa into the giant bug in Metamorphosis, and Kafka's many peculiar animal fables ("Investigations of a Dog, "Josephine the Mouse Singer"), but also small details in the novels themselves such as Leni`s fingers being connected by a web of skin in The Trial, or the frequent descriptions of what psychiatry terms 'inappropriate affect', the accompanying of sad words with laughter, for example. The physical gestures punctuate and dislocate the linguistic gestures:

"Gestures often serve as counterpoints to words: the prelinguistic that eludes all intention upsets the ambiguity, which, like a disease, has eaten into all signification in Kafka."[26]

The prelinguistic, though, is not a bodily moment that can be returned to as if it had not been affected by any destruction of subjectivity. It is not in the bodily gesture that a humanity can refound its embodiment, but the gesture, unwilled, lights up the fate of a certain form of embodiment as a destruction of experience. What occurs with the bodily gesture in Kafka is, at the same time, something eternal and ephemeral, slowed down to a point of standstill. The gesture takes on the aura of an eternalised image, but at the same time is purely ephemeral, unwilled and transitory. Although Adorno does not refer to this, one thinks of a fugue state of schizophrenia, a slowed down, indecipherable, ephemeral, yet completely emphatic non-linguistic gesturing. Adorno refers to such gestures as "eternalised" and they have the effect, like Benjamin's dialectical images, of bringing "the momentary to a standstill".[27] The gesture is an extreme form of individuation, the bodily expression of meaning without language and often without intention, but it returns in Kafka as a horrific revelation of something beyond the subjective ego, the revelation of an alienated yet precarious life within the subject. The subject is frightened by its own gestures, and those of others, and, at the same time, invests them with an emphatic and premonitory meaning. What this moment reveals in Kafka's work is a moment of regression, marked by a revelation of the objectivity within the subject:

"The crucial moment, however, toward which everything in Kafka is directed is that in which men become aware that they are not themselves - that they themselves are things."[28]

This awareness is horrific, but also opens up a dissolution of subjectivity which can reveal itself in the momentary time of a 'now' which does not complete time, but arrests life itself in the gesture, and in this arrest returns the subject to all that it depends on and all it has lost as embodiment. There is a closeness to a redemptive reading of gesture in Adorno here, but the final move of a gathering of this temporal breakthrough as a redemption of all that is lost in a completion of time is lacking. There is no completion, only momentary arrest, and no fulfillment, but only a form of extreme dissociation. The destruction of gesture does not presume an absolute gesturality to which it relates, but only the loss of any relation to the gesture as such.

Agamben writes on gesture in a very similar way, of the gesture being a figure of:

" ... (an) annihilated human existence, its 'negative outline', and at the same time, its self-transcendence not toward a beyond but ... in a profane mystery whose sole object is existence itself."[29]

The "profane mystery" is related to a concept of an absolute gesturality, which Agamben then outlines as the sphere of a redemptive politics, a politics that would relate itself to an "absolute gesturality of human beings".[30] But there is no positive redemption of an absolute gesturality in Adorno's negative thinking of the gesture. The similarity with a redemptive experience is that the gesture is an index of absolute loss, as horror, the body confronting the subject as something beyond its control, and in that moment of being beyond control, the gesture also figures a form of reconciliation, a life which could be surprised by the excess of its own embodiment over the structures of its subjectivity.[31]

4. Music in the Background.

In an early essay from 1934, entitled "Music in the Background", Adorno analyses the phenomenon of café music, or incidental music. Music has been pushed into the background, into a reified or incidental form of listening. The music itself is reduced to its barest and degraded form, and often played in specially conceived arrangements, and with particular exaggerated effects. However, something still survives in the ruin of this music and in the interplay of the music and the people in the café. The pale resemblance of the original music still has the effect of offering a certain illumination to the surroundings. It offers such an illumination in two ways. First, as objective ruin amongst a reified scene it imitates and confirms this scene, precisely as a kind of ghostly mood music. Adorno writes of this effect in the following way:

"The coldness from table to table: the strangeness between the young gentleman and the unknown girl across from him ... coldness, desire, the strangeness of the closeness between the two – the music transports it with an abrupt gesture into the stars, like the name of Ariadne abandoned."[32]

The equivalence between the coldness of the situation in the café and the confirmation of such a situation by the music provides an independent testimony of the ruin of experience.

However, the second moment in this account of background music is the moment when a piece of music attempts to breakthrough, to reveal itself and stake its claim beyond the ruin of its own arrangement, context and reception. The dissolution of the music in both its arrangement, and in the context in which it is arranged nevertheless expresses an intimation of its original form, an intimation which is presented as a ruin of that form. This dissolution of the essence of the music does not make the music fall silent, does not stop at dissolution, as a completed process of dissolution would make the works fall silent. There is in this ruined form, a dissolution, that is still audible:

"The question is only whether they stop at dissolution. In dissolution the works fall silent. Here, they become audible once again. Not, it is true, they themselves, in their structured form. But the ruins of their sound have been joined together in a second, strangely transparent form. The first fiddler does not make the noble melody ordinary with his soloistic intrusiveness; it has already lost its

noble character and therefore abandons itself to the fiddler. The truly noble melody will shine like a star against the background: one hears it as music."[33]

The shock of the music as it is experienced by the listener who is not listening, is a form of awakening, but what they are awakening to is a ruin itself, a ruin of a certain tradition. There is no complete moment of rescue here, though, no completed transcendence, but just the realisation that what the listener hears despite themselves, what breaks through, is itself only breaking through in a degraded form. It cannot be recuperated or redeemed, but it can open the possibility of a different way of being, something beyond this current experience, alongside this frustration of an awareness that the current experience is not itself all there is for experience. Thus, Adorno's quotation of a phrase from Karl Kraus is appropriate here, in that what is revealed is that:

"Nothing is true, and it is possible that something else will happen."[34]

As a motto for a metaphysical experience, this serves quite well, and it shows the distance in Adorno's concept of metaphysical experience from any affirmative idea of redemption. The breakthrough is not conceived in terms of its relation to redemption, but its relations both to an extreme negation and an extreme possibility: nothing is true and something else might happen.

5.Nothing to Do.

In his aphorism, "Sur l'Eau", Adorno outlines a form of negativity without any use, as a form of life analogous to a bestial existence. Such a life would not function in terms of productive goals, but remains within itself, as a body with nothing to realise, "Rien faire comme une bête", lying on water and looking peacefully at the sky".[35] Such an existence is without need or fulfillment, and encapsulates a certain form of being nothing. There is nothing but absolute peace here, a life that exists as a nothingness. What differentiates this from Agamben's use of the figure of Bartleby is that the aphorism serves the purpose of a negation of a productivist concept of utopia, and replaces it with a concept of utopia as absolute peace. However, neither of these concepts rest as an ontological first or as an absolute emphasis upon a transgressive sovereignty of experience. Agamben's thinking of potentiaility is a subtle affirmation of a nothingness of the will which still attempts to affirm itself as an existence, as a potentiality, but, nevertheless, in its affirmation does not take into account how such an ontological concept is itself determined by social forms. The idea of absolute peace, which we have seen in the comments on Beckett and Kafka, as a tension between a conservative concept of reconciliation and an image of a life become hell, the ever-changing forms of capitalism as the ever same, is affirmed in this aphorism, as an experience beyond any use. However, both sides of the dialectic need to be thought in relation to each other, an idea of life beyond productivity, and the idea of the hell of an exhaustion of bodily possibility as the petrification of subjectivity itself. This petrification has its extreme form in the body under torture, that Jean Amèry has written about. The complete transformation of the body into flesh under torture is

the extreme counter pole of a dialectic which emphasises the existence, like a beast, of an absolute nothingness of the will. The production of a nothingness of the will in the body of the person tortured, raped or abused results in a reduction to an embodiment without any experience of redemption or reconciliation, as Amèry writes:

> "But only in torture does the transformation of the person into flesh become complete. Frail in the face of violence, yelling out in pain, awaiting no help, capable of no resistance, the tortured person is only a body, and nothing else beside that".[36]

Such an experience is then inscribed in the subjectivity of the person who has been subjected to torture. There is no longer any place for such a subject to feel at one with its own embodiment. There is no redemption or reconciliation in this form of bare life.

Dissolution of Subjectivity

All these figures of exhaustion result in a dissolution of subjectivity. In Negative Dialectics, Adorno states that the aim of his philosophy is "total self-relinquishment".[37] However, such a dissolution will not always result in a metaphysical experience, as an opening to the possibility of non-identity. The dissolution experienced by the person who is tortured only allows for an

annihilation of experience. This is a pure dissolution of experience, which cannot open itself to any form of reconciliation. This is a negative experience of redemption, in that it shares the hallmarks of this experience; the body is experienced as an excess of subjectivity, time stops, and the ego dissolves. But, this also occurs through an experience of total subjugation that does not allow for any appropriation of this experience in terms of an opening of the structures of subjectivity. If a dissolution of subjectivity is to be characterised as a metaphysical experience, it cannot result in the completion dissolution of the subject into "flesh". There must be an opening to a new form of subjectivity in the experience. It is precisely this opening that is lacking in the body under torture, which is the forced dissolution of subjectivity into a bare life that is totally dominated.

There are two ways that Adorno writes about a constructed dissolution of the subject, which can result in a "total self-relinquishment", which would then give a model of an experience of reconciliation. Firstly, there is the hermeneutical practice of an aesthetic or philosophical experience. This is a hermeneutic that distances itself from any attempt to construct a completed meaning but attempts to open either the art object or the philosophical concept up to a process of interpretation which creates gaps in meaning rather than final meanings. Such gaps, like the gestures in Kafka's novels, or the exhaustive series of possibilities of walking or sucking in Beckett's novels, or the constellations of concepts in a contradictory presentation, induce in the recipient an experience of possibility. Such an experience is not that of an actuality, as it relates to either the reception of an

artwork, or the experience of a gap or a failure in a conceptual series. However, it does register as experience in the form of a dissolution of subjectivity, in the emphatic mode of an extreme individuation which finds itself in its own decay, either through horror, or a transfigured recognition. This "extreme form" of individuation is an individual experience in a process of degeneration that can reveal the possibility of what has been missed and what could be changed.[38] At its most extreme, this can be revealed in bodily gesture.

Adorno's account of such experiences as metaphysical distinguishes them from a simple destruction and annihilation of subjectivity, through the comportment induced by the aesthetic experience or the experience of reading the philosophical text. Metaphysical experience is a form of Erlebnis, but not the degraded form of reflex responses. Rather, it is an experience that cannot be clearly outlined conceptually or materially, but interrupts everyday temporality without completing it. However, such an Erlebnis can only be thought in relation to a concept of Erfahrung as an ability to open oneself to the possibility of a metaphysical experience, an openness that comes through the ability for a consummate achievement of determinate negativity. This is as an achievement of lingering with the object, producing an interpretation through a mimesis which allows the object itself to come into view. It is precisely such an experience that is being destroyed in the increasing reification of capitalist society. Without such an experience (Erfahrung), there can be no metaphysical experience as an experience of interpretation or reading. Benjamin's project of turning the degraded Erlebnisse of modernity into Erfahrungen is complicated for Adorno, because he refuses the

affirmative concept of redemption required by such a project. Agamben can affirm a destruction exemplified by a form of life that is removed only by a hair's breadth from bare life, because he has an affirmative concept of the redemptive which can save that which has completely fallen. The problem for Adorno, is the possibility of the total annihilation of the fallen, as the example of the tortured body as a produced total self-relinquishment demonstrates. The relation of mimetic comportment as experience and praxis is not developed and therefore the call for a praxis demanded through the total self-relinquishment remains gestural in a bad sense of the word.

The second mode in which a dissolution of subjectivity becomes a metaphysical experience does not relate to the construction of constellations of concepts, or the aesthetic experience of modernist artworks. This is the experience encapsulated in the exhaustion of an "is that all ?" or a fruitless waiting. The experience of the place-name is a model of experience not through frustration, but through the lack of an expected disappointment. One would expect an experience of disappointment, because the place actually visited does not fulfill the promise of the place-name. What is peculiar about Adorno's description of the place-name is this model of a lack of disappointment. Why is disappointment not experienced when the hopes invested in the place-name do not actualise themselves on the longed-for visit ? What returns unwilled in this lack of disappointment must be something unconscious, analogous to the other experiences Adorno describes, such as déjà vu. What occurs in the experience of déjà vu, is not simply the experience of an uncanniness caused by a feeling that one has been in the place before. On

the contrary, there is a gap in the expectation of what is presented to an initial expectation, a gap that presents itself in the form of "that's not all there is". Such an experience relates to the unconscious, to a return of something unbidden as a natural moment within the unconscious. But this is not a return to a plenitude, but to a feeling of being at home, at complete ease with that which is fundamentally differentiated. It is the return of such a repressed feeling that opens the subject to the realisation that what exists is not the total sum of possibility. This is the Proustian model of experience, not the mémoire involuntaire so frequently quoted. Involuntary memory promises a traditional reconciliation with a fulfilled notion of sensuous objectivity, that completes and traverses time, in a unity of the past with the present, in the emphatic, yet unwilled sensation that brings back the initial taste or smell. The experience of the place-name as Adorno outlines it, is a jolt to an expected order of experience given by the fact that disappointment does not follow.

The key to thinking these two concepts together lies in Adorno's use of mimesis. Mimesis is described in Dialectic of Enlightenment, as both an opening to the other and an attempt to control otherness through imitation. The mode of domination of an originary mimetic comportment lies in its attempt to model itself on the objectivity, as a means of displacing its power. Lying within such a concept of mimesis is the possibility of a form of a rational control of nature, which does not proceed through identification. However, such a mimetic comportment is entrapped as it proceeds through fear. It functions only as a failed stage of an attempt to control the natural. What is lost in the movement from

mimesis to identity thinking is this mode of rationality co-existing with non-identity. What Adorno attempts to recuperate as metaphysical experience is a concept of the mimetic that sublimates the fearful moment contained within mimesis. This is sublimated through experiences such as the aesthetic shudder, or the fearful identification of the listener in the café with the ruined, background music. However, because such a fear does not take place in a situation where humans are controlled by nature, but have dominated nature to the point of its invisibility, the fearful moment immediately sublimates itself into the awareness of the loss of the liberating or reconciled moment of mimetic rationality. Mimesis in this sense is not the description of a faculty that has simply migrated into aesthetic comportment, but a certain mode of relation that is repressed and returns in the experience of a self-relinquishment. This self-relinquishment is the main marker of a mimetic comportment.

The difficulty is how to differentiate these experiences of a disintegration of subjectivity from the general disintegration of the subject produced in society at large, and even more, the model of a radical disintegration of the subject in the process of torture or the reduction of a life worse than death in the camps. How can a subject bear witness to its own ruin ? For Agamben, the only response to such a question can be through a redemptive assumption of that position as revealing the salvation within what is most fallen and degraded. This salvation proceeds by removing by the smallest amount the bare life to a form of life which cannot be dominated, but as a remnant can be saved. Such a remnant is the difference between the figures of Bartleby and the Muselmann. The difference

between a life that is completely open to be dominated and a life that cannot be dominated proceeds through an assumption of the dominated position, as that position which cannot be dominated. It is not the assumption of the stance of the masochist, but the assumption of an originary potentiality that doesn't allow power to take hold. But such an originary potentiality, in itself, is a petrified form of life, a nothingness itself. Deleuze describes Bartleby and other similar characters in Melville's work in the following terms:

> "But at the other pole are those angels or saintly hypochondriacs, almost stupid, creatures of innocence and purity, stricken with a constitutive weakness but also with a strange beauty. Petrified by nature, they prefer ... no will at all, a nothingness of the will rather than a will to nothingness (hypochondriacal "negativism"). They can only survive by becoming stone, by denying the will and sanctifying themselves in this suspension."[39]

This is a description of a pre-historical form of mimesis, a petrification, in the terms of both an immobility and a fearful imitation, but a petrification that in its attempt to escape domination, reduces itself to a nothingness. Such a petrification is produced in the aesthetic experiences of modernist artworks that Adorno describes, but the imitation induced there reveals the petrification of subjectivity itself in a mimesis with capitalist forms of temporality, particularly the conjunction of a transient historical mode of production as an eternal feature of human existence. What is feared is no longer the domination of nature, but the extirpation

of all that is natural within the subject, by an eternalised present. The breakthrough moment of an aesthetic experience opens the subject to an image of time itself as standing still in terms of the form of life reproduced within capitalist society. Adorno writes that:

> "The life process itself ossifies in the expression of the ever-same ... The absurdity explodes: that something happens where the phenomenon says that nothing more could happen; its attitude becomes terrifying. In this experience of terror, the terror of the system forcibly coalesces into appearance; the more the system expands, the more it hardens into what it has already been. What Benjamin called "dialectics at a standstill" is surely less a Platonizing residue than the attempt to raise such paradoxes to philosophical consciousness."[40]

The terror produced by the dialectical image is a fear of the system itself, and is therefore, the production of a critical subjectivity in the form of a recognition of its own domination. Mimesis serves to displace narcissism. Furthermore, the inducement of a mimesis opens the subject to the reconciling modes within mimetic rationality, the possibility of a form of rationality which could exist with otherness in a relation other than domination or fear. Such a possibility can only be induced by certain experiences, such as aesthetic experiences, and the metaphysical experiences outlined above. The suspension of time in a negative redemptive moment, either of terror, or of the dislocation of expectation caused by metaphysical experience, produces the return of a reconciliatory moment which is

not concerned with unity but with a way of being at home with that which is differentiated from the subject.

Conclusion

Agamben has described a paradigm as a "singularity which, showing itself as such, produces a new ontological context".[1] Bare life is such a singularity. Through an analysis of forms of life, where the distinction between life and death, biology and politics, and private and public experience no longer has any grounding within the body of the human subject, Agamben elucidates a political ontology of the present which stems from a number of singularities in modern life. The paradigm of bare life takes seriously the attempt to think both the continuity and the discontinuity of a life after Auschwitz as survival and sets out the problem of how there can be a life where there is life no longer.

I have argued that any response to such a question must proceed immanently from such a damaged state of life. This is the strength of both Adorno and Agamben's insistence on an immanent attempt to provide an account of an experience of life beyond the reified context of damaged life. However, there is a limit to such an affirmation of immanence. The appropriation of bare life itself, as a means of opening the subject to the emptiness constitutive of subjectivity cannot provide any space for the construction of a critical subjectivity towards the process of its own dissolution. Agamben's emphasis on a "life that does not live" as the means which can be appropriated for its own salvation, in terms of a potentiality that holds itself in reserve, only preserves the situation of damaged life through the elevation of a pure moment of redemption.

Adorno's analysis of damaged life and experience has an immanent emphasis on the dissolution of experience as a means for moving beyond dissolution, which can open the possibility of a critical subjectivity. This is because his treatment of the statement "life does not live" as a contradiction reflects a state of historical development, and a tension within the subject. Life does not live, not only because of its complete reification, but also because there is a moment of recognition of this reification, which is produced through the deepening of a dialectical contradiction. Dialectics works through the extremes and, it is in the extremity of a construction of a life in which life has been extirpated that the possibility of a different way of living can be glimpsed.

There is no foundational concept of life that can be resuscitated intact and serve as a route beyond this reified context. However, there are traces of life which have survived, not intact, but at the margins of identity thinking. Concepts such as mimesis, aura and the somatic remainder function as gestures towards embodied experience. However, I have argued that such concepts are not thought adequately in relation to a concept of embodiment, and Adorno's account of the migration of mimetic comportment into aesthetics needs to be supplemented with an account of it as an embodied experience. I have highlighted examples where this occurs in concepts such as the shudder, the return of mimesis in a negative redemptive experience, and the model of an unfulfilled experience that can serve as a means of figuring a changed concept of reconciliation. Such a model does not involve a recovery of an originary embodied rationality, but traces which can be remodelled within a future way of living. Adorno's concept of life is related to

the possibility that life could be different, rather than a rescue of that which is lost.

However, a different way of living that can proceed through the dissolution of experience itself can only open itself to possibility, and not annihilation, if there is an opening to life at the end of a dialectical process of dissolution. This demands an account of the destruction of experience which is not total. Adorno's attempts at a presentation of philosophy which creates gaps in conceptual series, and a disintegration of experience that reveals both the reification of life and the possibility that it could be changed, relies on the survival of a certain kind of experience.

Such an experience involves the ability to linger with objectivity and model the subject on an object in a way that could allow a relation between subjectivity and objectivity that does not dominate through identification. Such an experience can only be configured negatively, in terms of a mimesis of a deadened form of life, which I outlined through figures of exhaustion in the final chapter. However, there are also experiences which open the subject to the possibility of reconciliation, through an awareness that life does not consist of fulfillment through identification, but through an 'opening' to objectivity.

There are therefore three forms of experience that Adorno outlines, each of which relates differently to the concept of life. First, there is an experience of interpretation, either aesthetic or philosophical, which consists in the ability to allow the object to be interpreted without a final closure. This is the experience that Adorno describes in his account of the form of the essay, or the experience

of reading Hegel's philosophy, or elsewhere as a form of mimetic comportment that relates to the ability of the individual to free herself from a rigid subjectivity, in order to be open to the object. Such an experience is a prerequisite for a dissolution of subjectivity that is not going to result in an annihilation of experience. I have argued that Adorno needs a better account of how this concept of experience survives the destruction of experience, and is transformed historically as embodied experience. The body is a naturalistic ground of experience that nevertheless must be historicised, but unless such an experience can be accounted for in terms of its transformation over time, it reverts to an ahistorical construction of a form of rationality largely unaffected by the historical destruction of experience itself. Such an experience relates to life in terms of its embodiment, in similar ways to those that John Dewey has described as being premised on an ability to exist temporally and spatially in a rhythmic, yet non-dominating relation with the environment. Such accounts will change historically. I outlined one form of such an experience in terms of Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodied experience as the "touched-touching", and discussed its relation to Adorno's account of the importance of a distanced nearness for a model of a reconciled relation of experience. An account of the "touched-touching" as it changes through time enables an account of what is lost and what survives in embodied experience. We can then construct anew what it means to have an experience, in the sense of a distanced nearness, in each historical period.

The second form of experience is the experience of breakthrough, the experience that I have termed a negative redemptive moment. Such an experience

only occurs through a dissolution of experience itself that opens the subject to the mimesis of life as deadened. This is the relation of experience and life in the negative redemptive moment. Benjamin writes:

> "A historical materialist cannot do without a notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop ... Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallises into a monad."[2]

This moment of breakthrough is negative, because it does not redeem what is lost or fulfill time, but enables an experience of reification, life as reified. However, in this negative experience there is a reverse image of reconciliation, as a vanishing point of this negative redemptive moment, an ability to live harmoniously with that which is differentiated from subjectivity. Reconciliation functions here as the vanishing point of a negative redemptive breakthrough since the predominant experience of the dissolution of subjectivity is one of horror at the deadened existence, and protest at the relinquishing of the rigidity of the ego. But this opening is itself a process of letting go of subjectivity that can weakly image a fuller conception of an experience of reconciliation, which can only come about through this individual experience, against the rigid, dominating subjective ego.

The third form of experience is the trace or figure of a reconciled experience that opens the subject to a different experience of life, as one without domination.

In its strongest form, in metaphysical experiences, this experience is the experience of possibility itself. However, this experience of a pure possibility, although related to what Agamben terms potentiality, immediately dissolves in the moment of the metaphysical experience and returns the subject to a reified life. But it remains as an exigency or demand within thought that things could be otherwise. In this sense Adorno's metaphysics calls for a politics, whereas Agamben's metaphysics dissolves politics into metaphysics. Although the concept of the political is left undetermined by both thinkers, Adorno's account of a changed concept of metaphysical experience demands a political response, even if it disavows any content given to such a response. The relation between this third form of experience and life, is the futural aspect of a demand that life be different. The experience of possibility opens the subject to the realisation that the lack of fulfillment constitutive of the metaphysical experience can serve as a model of an experience which would not lie with the complete unity of subject and object in a fulfilled mode.

However, to register such an experience in a critical way still depends on a subject. Without subjective experience, as embodied experience that proceeds through self-reflection to an awareness of its inherent contradictions, there can be no possibility for an experience that would point to a life beyond the "life that does not live". Such a subjective experience cannot be thought alone as that of a formal subject that denies its own relation to materiality, but furthermore, neither can it be a complete dissolution of subjective experience, without a moment of a recovery of the subject. Such a moment of recovery can only be theorised in

terms of a bodily experience itself, a basis, a locus, to which human experience always returns, but in a reified form. This is not a return to an originary potentiality, but a body exhausted with all that it embodies, which, nevertheless, in the painful realisation of its own fragility as subjectivity, is opened towards the possibility of a different form of life.

Notes

Introduction.

[1] MM, p.20/19.

[2] There are numerous discussions of Erfahrung, some of which are cited in the text as the concept is analysed in more detail. One of the best discussions of both Erfahrung and Erlebnis is contained in Gadamer, Hans-Georg. Truth and Method, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (Sheed and Ward, London, 1989). Martin Jay's recent history of the concept of experience, Songs of Experience. Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme,(University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2005), contains numerous illuminating discussions of both Erfahrung and Erlebnis in relation to a number of different thinkers.

[3] Jay gives an account of the formation of the concept by Wilhelm Dilthey in Songs of Experience, through his biographical work on Schleiermacher, see pp.95-96, and p.222.

[4] Dilthey, Willhelm. Introduction to the Human Sciences: An Attempt to Lay a Foundation for the Study of Society and History, translated by Ramon J.Betanzos (Detroit, 1988, p.173).

[5] See Jarvis, Simon. Adorno: A Critical Introduction, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p.158.

[6] The attempt to give a more positive account of the concept of life within Adorno's work, its relation to experience and ethics is contained in J.M Bernstein's recent book, Adorno. Disenchantment and Ethics, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2001). The argument for a transcendental interpretation of Adorno's critique of identity thinking in terms of its affirmation of a concept of rational identity thinking beneath and beyond negative dialectics is contained within Brian O'Connor's book Adorno's Negative Dialectic. Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality, (MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 2004).

[7] Agamben's only sustained discussions of texts by Adorno are in the essay "The Prince and the Frog", from his collection of essays entitled Infancy and History. Essays on the Destruction of Experience, translated by Liz Heron. (Verso, London, New York, 1993). There is a discussion of Adorno's concept of redemption in Le Temps qui Reste. Un commentaire de l'Épître aux Romains, translated from the Italian by Judith Revel, (Rivages Poches, Petite Bibliothèque, Paris, 2004). This text is awaiting publication in English translation.

Chapter One: Auschwitz.

[1] ND, p.314/320.

[2] ND, p.354/362.

[3] MM, p.55/49.

[4] Brecher, Bob. "Understanding the Holocaust. The uniqueness debate". Radical Philosophy, 96, (July/August 1999), pp.17-28.

[5] Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. Heidegger, Art and Politics, translated by Chris Turner, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1990), p.48. This discussion of Auschwitz takes place within the context of an analysis of the Heidegger affair. It could be said that it is easier to characterise Heidegger's entry into Nazi politics as a metaphysical decision, the revelation of a philosophy of resoluteness within an acceptance of a certain Germanic fate, that related more to Heidegger's understanding of the fate of metaphysics and nihilism within Western history, than to understand the Nazi genocide as a metaphysical decision per se.

[6] Ibid, p.45.

[7] Düttmann, Alexander García. The Memory of Thought. An Essay on Heidegger and Adorno, translated by Nicholas Walker, (Continuum, London and New York, 2002),p.139.

[8] Lyotard, Jean-Francois. Heidegger and the "jews", translated by Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts, with an introduction by David Carroll, (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 1990),p.22.

[9] Levi, Primo. The Drowned and the Saved, translated by Raymond Rosenthal, (Abacus, London,1986), pp.83-102.

[10] Lyotard, Jean-Francois. Heidegger and the "jews", p.43.

[11] Lyotard, Jean-Francois. The Differend, translated by Georges Van Den Abdeele, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988),p.88.

[12] Ibid, pp88-89.

[13] Ibid, p.91.

[14] Lyotard, Jean-Francois. Heidegger and "the jews",p.29.

[15] Ibid,p.23.

[16] Lyotard, Jean-Francois. "Adorno as the Devil", translated by Robert Hurley, Telos, 19, (Spring 1974), pp.127-137.

[17] Cited in Carroll, David, introduction to Heidegger and "the jews", p.xxvii.

[18] Baudrillard, Jean. Simulacra and Simulation, translated by Sheila Faria Gloser, (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1994), p.49.

[19] Adorno, T.W. "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft", in Gesammelte Schriften, volume 10.1, Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I, (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main,1996), pp.11-31. "Culture Critique and Society", in Prisms, translated by Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber Nicholsen. (MIT Press, Massachusetts, 1982), pp.17-35.

[20] Ibid, p.28/33.

[21] Ibid, p.30/34.

[22] ND, p. 355/362-363. There is an interesting discussion of Celan's response to Adorno's injunction in Jäger, Lorenz. Adorno. A Political Biography, translated by Stewart Spencer, (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2004), pp.185-188.

[23] Grass, Günter. "Writing After Auschwitz", in Two States- One Nation ?, (Harvest, New York, 1991).

[24] Ibid, p.121.

[25] Ibid, p.121.

[26] Derrida, Jacques. " Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy", Oxford Literary Review, vol.6, no.2, (1984), p.20.

[27] Ibid,p.24.

[28] Ibid,p.24.

[29] Scherpe, Klaus. "Dramatization and De-dramatization of 'the End': The Apocalyptic Consciousness of Modernity and Post-Modernity", translated by Brent.O.Peterson, Cultural Critique, no.5,(Winter 1986-87), pp.95-129.

[30] Ibid, p.101.

[31] Rabinbach, Anson . In the Shadow of Catastrophe. German Intellectuals between Apocalypse and Enlightenment, (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2000).

[32] Even for Adorno, the catastrophes become producible, as Auschwitz as a name comes to stand for so much more, including the Vietnam War and Hiroshima, see MBP, p.160/101.

[33] Scherpe, "Dramatization and De-dramatization of "the End", p.122.

[34] Ibid, p.122.

[35] Ibid, p.129.

[36] Rabinbach, Anson. In the Shadow of Catastrophe, p.207.

[37] Carroll, David, in Heidegger and the "jews", p.x.

[38] Levi, Primo. The Drowned and the Saved, pp.22-52.

[39] Agamben, Giorgio. Remnants of Auschwitz – The Witness and the Archive, (Zone Books, New York, 1999), pp.44-45. Agamben discusses the origins of the term Muselmann, on these pages. There is little agreement on the origin and the use of the term and different terms were used in different camps. The term is the German for "Muslim", and is said to have been used to represent those within the camp who had passively given up on life. The analogy is with a stereotyped view of the Muslim religion as an example of a passive form of faith.

[40] Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. Heidegger, Art and Politics, p.5.

[41] Agamben notes that the term "Holocaust" derives from the Latin (Holocaustum) translation of the Greek term (Holocaustōma), meaning "completely burned", and with connotations of sacrificial rituals. the Christian derivation of the word and its linkage with a sacrificial meaning has led many commentators to refuse to use the term. See Remnants of Auschwitz, pp.28-31.

Chapter Two: Survival and Bare Life.

[1] Agamben, Remnants of Auschwitz, p.69.

[2] Ibid, p.165.

[3] Ibid, pp.166-171.

[4] Ibid, p.156.

[5] MM, p.13/15.

[6] Levi, Primo. If This Is A Man ?, translated by Stuart Woolf, (Abacus, London,1979), p.95.

[7] Agamben, Giorgio. Homo Sacer – Sovereign Power and Bare Life, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1998), p.25.

[8] Agamben. Homo Sacer, p.181.

[9] Agamben, Giorgio. "No to Bio-Political Tattooing", published as "Non au tatouage biopolitique" in Le Monde, Dimanche-Lundi, 11-12.1.04.

[10] Norris, Andrew. "The Exemplary Exception. Philosophical and Political Decisions in Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*." Radical Philosophy,119, (May/June 2003), pp.6-16.

[11] Ibid, p.14.

[12] Ibid, p.14.

[13] Agamben, Giorgio. State of Exception, translated by Kevin Attell, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2005), pp.52-64.

[14] Agamben, Giorgio. Means without End – Notes on Politics, translated by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 200).p.138.

[15] Agamben, Giorgio. Infancy and History – The Destruction of Experience, translated by Liz Heron, (Verso, London and New York, 1996), pp52-53.

[16] Agamben, Remnants of Auschwitz, p.151.

[17] Bernstein, Jay. Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2001), p.389n.(author's italics).

[18] Agamben, Giorgio. Homo Sacer, p.51.

[19] Alexander García Düttmann has discussed the category of relation in terms of Agamben's work in an essay entitled, "Never Before, always already. Notes on Agamben and the Category of Relation", in Angelaki, vol.6, no.3, (December 2001),pp.3-6. He interrogates this through the concept of the remnant in Agamben's book on Auschwitz and attempts to understand what the being together of a being and Being can mean if it doesn't have a relational form. My concern with Agamben's concept of bare life is precisely this ontological turn taken towards a thinking of bare life in relation to it as a revelation of some kind of being together of being and Being. This

issue will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven in consideration of Agamben's concept of potentiality.

[20] Agamben. Homo Sacer, p.1.

[21] There is a debate about how to translate the Italian "nuda vita", and in some other texts, the phrase is translated as naked life, see translators notes in Agamben, Giorgio. Means Without End. Notes on Politics, translated by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino. (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London,2000).

[22] Agamben. Homo Sacer, p.18.

[23] Agamben, Giorgio. The Open. Man and Animal, translated by Kevin Attell, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2004), pp.33-38.

[24] Ibid, p.37.

[25] Ibid, p.38.

[26] Ibid, p.21.

[27] Ibid, p.83.

[28] Ibid, p.83.

[29] Agamben. Homo Sacer, p.187.

[30] Ibid, p.187.

[31] Ibid,p.187.

[32] Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality – volume one. An Introduction, translated by Robert Hurley, (Penguin books,London,1990), p.159.

[33] Butler, Judith. Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence, (Verso, London, New York, 2004), pp.67-68. Although Agamben is mentioned in her text, Butler's reading of precarious life is more indebted to Levinas than to Agamben. Her reading and critique of Agamben consists in an interesting critique of the concept of sovereignty. However, despite this, Agamben's concept of bare life does often get read as a naturalistic or essentialist concept, which it is not.

[34] Agamben, Giorgio. Means without end - Notes on Politics, translated by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino. (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 2000), p.7.

[35] Ibid, p.7.

[36] Agamben, Giorgio. State of Exception, translated by Kevin Attell. University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2005), pp.87-88.

[37] "On the Concept of History", translated by Harry Zohn, in Eiland, Howard and Jennings, Michael.W. (eds.) Selected Writings, Vol.4, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 2003), p.392.

[38] Butler, Judith. Precarious Life, p.54.

[39] Rabinow , Paul and Rose, Nikolas (2003). "Thoughts on the Concept of Biopower Today", published on www.molsci.org, downloaded on 14.10.04.

[40] ND, p.358/365.

[41] Rabinow and Rose argue that the genetic "rewriting of mental illness" can operate in terms of happiness and quality of life, rather than in the name of population purification. The response to such a notion is that happiness and population purification are being thought together through a certain genetic rewriting of mental illness, which produces a complete emptiness of bare life, as the genetic rewriting is not fully understood, and neither is the mental illness that is being rewritten. One wonders what forms of happiness will result. See Rabinow and Rose, "Thoughts on the Concept of Biopower Today."

[42] Agamben, Giorgio. Means without end, p.9.

[43] Ibid, p.9.

[44] Agamben. Homo Sacer, p.188.

[45] Ibid, p.188.

Chapter Three: The Idea of Natural History.

[1] Jarvis, Simon. Adorno: A Critical Introduction,p.191.

[2] Palmer, Richard.E. Hermeneutics – Interpretation and Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer, (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1969).

[3] Bowie, Andrew. From Romanticism to Critical Theory – The philosophy of German Literary Theory, (Routledge, London and New York, 1997).

[4] Cited in Rickman, H.P. Willhelm Dilthey – Pioneer of the Human Sciences, (Paul Elek, London, 1979), p.54.

[5] Palmer, Richard. Hermeneutics, p.107.

[6] AP, pp.325-345/120-133.

[7] Arendt, Hannah. The Human Condition, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998), p.313, n76.

[8] MM,p.13/15.

[9] Bowie, Andrew. From Romanticism to Critical Theory .The Philosophy of German Literary Theory, pp.249-250.

[10] DA, pp.71-72/42.

[11] Marcuse, Herbert. Eros and Civilisation. A Philosophical Enquiry into Freud, (London: Ark, 1987).

[12] Bauer, Karin. Adorno's Nietzschean Narratives- Critiques of Ideology, Readings of Wagner, (SUNY, Albany, 1999), p.92.

[13] DA, p.73/43.

[14] Nietzsche, F. The Will to Power, translated by Walter Kaufman and R.J. Hollingdale, edited by Walter Kaufman, (Vintage Books, New York, 1968), p.345.

[15] Ibid,p.342.

[16] MM, p.110/97.

[17] Ansell-Pearson, Keith. Viroid Life- Perspectives on the Transhuman Condition,(Routledge, London, New York, 1997), p.31.

[18] Bernstein, J.M. Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics, p.200.

[19] Whitebrook, Joel. Perversion and Utopia- A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory, (MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1995), p.41.

[20] Freud, Sigmund. The Freud Reader, edited by Peter Gay, (W.W. Norton and Co, New York, London, 1989), p.568.

[21] Whitebrook. Perversion and Utopia, p.151, author's italics.

[22] Ibid, p.131.

[23] Adorno, T.W. "Zum Verhältnis von Soziologie und Psychologie", in GS, 8, Soziologische Schriften.I, pp.42-85."Sociology and Psychology", translated by Irving Wohlfarth, New Left Review, No.46, Nov-Dec 1967, pp.67-80, and No.47, Jan-Feb 1968, pp.79-97.

[24] Ibid, pp.61-62/80.

[25] Whitebrook. Perversion and Utopia, p.133.

[26] Adorno, T.W. "Zum Verhältnis von Soziologie und Psychologie", p.72/88.

[27] Ibid, pp.73-74/89.

[28] Ibid,p.75/90.

[29] MM, p.13/15.

[30] ND, p.98/91.

[31] ND, pp.190-191/190.

[32] ND, p.191/190.

[33] Adorno's early work is influenced by Lukács's early literary criticism, an influence that can be seen in the essay "The Idea of Natural History" (INH). Adorno's later comments on Lukács refer to his later Marxist work in a critical manner. An example of this can be seen in the essay "Erpreßte Versohnung", in GS, 11, NL, pp.251-281, translated as "Reconciliation under Duress", in Notes to Literature, Vol.1, translated by Shierry Weber Nicholsen.

[34] Buck-Morss, Susan. The Origin of Negative Dialectics – Theodor.W.Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute, (New York: Free Press, 1977).

[35] Jay, Martin. Marxism and Totality – The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas, (Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 1984).

[36] Rose, Gillian . The Melancholy Science – An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor.W.Adorno, (MacMillan Press, Ltd, London and Basingstoke, 1978).

[37] Ibid, pp.28-43.

[38] Lukács, Georg. History and Class Consciousness – Studies in Marxist Dialectics, translated by Rodney Livingstone, (Merlin Press, London,1971), p.140.

[39] Ibid, p.110.

[40] Ibid, p.177.

[41] INH, pp. 345-366/111-125.

[42] Ibid, p. 346/111-112.

[43] Marcuse, Herbert. Hegel`s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity, translated by Seyla Benhabib, (MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusets, London, England, 1987).

[44] Cited in Benhabib, Seyla, introduction to Hegel`s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity, p.xxxi.

[45] INH, p.354/ 117.

[46] Ibid, pp.354-355/117.

[47] Ibid,p.357/118.

[48] Ibid, pp.360-361/121.

Chapter Four: Re-Enchanting Nature.

[1] McDowell, John. Mind and World. (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1994). The main tenets of Bernstein's argument are in his book, Adorno:Disenchantment and Ethics, but an earlier formulation of his argument is also important, as it outlines more specifically his agreements and disagreements with McDowell, "Re-Enchanting Nature", in Journal for the British Society for Phenomenology, vol.31, no.3, Oct.2000, pp.277-296.

[2] Bernstein, Jay. Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics, p.40.

[3] Ibid, p.91.

[4] Ibid,p.91.

[5] Ibid, p.196.

[6] Bernstein, J.M. "Re-Enchanting Nature", p.282.

[7] McDowell, Mind and World, p.23.

[8] Ibid, p.46.

[9] McDowell, Mind and World, p.78.

[10] Bernstein, J.M. "Re-Enchanting Nature", p.281.

[11] Bernstein acknowledges that his use of this concept comes from Robert Brandom's book, Making It Explicit.Reasoning, Representing and Discursive Commitment, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1994). For a further discussion of material inference and Bernstein's use of Brandom's work, see Bernstein, J.M. "Mimetic Rationality and Material Inference: Adorno and Brandom", in Revue Internationale de Philosophie, no.1, (Janvier, 2004), pp.7-25.

[12] I am indebted to the following critique of McDowell for my point here, Wright, Crispin. "Human Nature", European Journal of Philosophy, vol.4, No.2 (Aug.1996), pp.235-255. The article is a review of Mind and World. Bernstein mentions Wright's critique in his article "Re-Enchanting Nature", but doesn't focus any attention to it.

[13] Butler, Judith. Precarious Life, p.134.

[14] Ibid, p.218.

[15]INH,pp.354-355/117.

[16] Bernstein, J.M. Adorno.Disenchantment and Ethics, pp.191-192.

[17] Stern, Robert. "Going Beyond the Kantian Philosophy: On McDowell's Hegelian Critique of Kant", European Journal of Philosophy, vol.7, no.2, Aug.1999, pp.260-261.

[18] Bernstein, J.M. "Negative Dialectic as Fate: Adorno and Hegel, in Huhn, Tom (ed.),The Cambridge Companion to Adorno, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2004) , pp.19-51.

[19] Ibid, p.41.

[20] Bernstein, J.M. The Fate of Art - Aesthetic Alienation From Kant to Derrida and Adorno, (Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 1992), p.204.

[21] This point is commented upon by Kirk Pillow in "Comment on Stern's "Going Beyond the Kantian Philosophy". European Journal of Philosophy, vol.7, No.2, Aug.1999, pp.270-274.

[22] MM, p.83/74.

[23] NL, p.21/13.

[24] Ibid, p.18/10.

[25] Kant, Immanuel. Critique of Judgement, translated by James Meredith, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1952),p.58.

[26] Ibid, p.64.

[27] Bell, David. "The Art of Judgement", Mind, vol.96, 1987, pp.234-237.

[28] SO, p.752/254.

[29] MM, p.270/236.

[30] ND, p.99/92.

[31] AT, p.86/53.

[32] In AT, Adorno refers to the "unique and truly free John Dewey", p.498/335. There is also an approving reference to Dewey in DSH, p.373/144.

[33] Dewey, John. Art as Experience, (Milton Balch and Company, New York, 1934), p.19.

[34] Ibid, p.168.

[35] Ibid, p.193.

[36] Ibid, p.162.

[37] Ibid, pp21-24.

[38] AT, pp.87-88/54.

[39] AT, p.364/245.

[40] AT,p.364/245.

[41] AT, p.363/245.

[42] AT, p.365/246.

[43] AT, p.364/245.

[44] AT, p.490/331.

[45] AT, pp.489-490/331.

Chapter Five: The Decay of Experience.

[1] Jay, Martin. "Is Experience Still in Crisis ? Reflections on A Frankfurt School Lament?", in Huhn, Tom (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to Adorno, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2004), pp.129-147.

[2] Ibid, p.130.

[3] Ibid, p.130.

[4] AP, p.342/131.

[5] AP, p.342/131, translation amended.

[6] Agamben, Giorgio. Infancy and History. Essays on the Destruction of Experience, translated by Liz Heron, (Verso, London, New York, 1993), p.19.

[7] Benjamin, Walter. " The Storyteller", in Illuminations, translated by Harry Zohn, (Glasgow, Fontana, 1973,) p.93.

[8] DA, p.20/2.

[9] The English word "experience" has its roots in the Latin "experiri", as does the word "peril", and the similarity between experience and danger, emphasises the importance of a moment of openness to experience that Adorno reads in Bacon's concept.

[10] Agamben, Infancy and History, p.24.

[11] Ibid, p.25.

[12] Ibid, p.25.

[13] Ibid, p.32.

[14] Benjamin, Walter. " The Storyteller", p.86.

[15] Agamben, Infancy and History, p.24.

[16] Ibid, p.31.

[17] Ibid, p.32.

[18] Benjamin, Walter. "On the Programme of the Coming Philosophy",in Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, (Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1996), p.108.

[19] Ibid, p.106.

[20] Ibid, p.100.

[21] KK, passim.

[22] KK, p.329/217.

[23] KK, p.335/221.

[24] KK, pp.330-331/218-219.

[25] KK, p.271/178.

[26] Agamben, Giorgio. Infancy and History, p.32.

[27] Ibid, p.33.

[28] Ibid, p.34.

[29] Ibid, p.27.

[30] G.W.F. Hegel. Phenomenology of Spirit, translated by A.V. Miller. (New York: Oxford University Press,1977),p.55.

[31] DSH, p.310/71.

[32] Ibid, p.311/72.

[33] Heidegger, Martin. Hegel's Concept of Experience, (Harper and Row, New York, 170), p.113.

[34] DSH, p.310/71.

[35] DSH, p.316/78.

[36] DSH, p.318/80.

[37] DSH, pp.324-325/pp.87-88.

[38] Benjamin, Walter. Charles Baudelaire. A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism, translated by Harry Zohn, (Verso, London and New York, 1999).

[39] Gadamer, Hans-Georg. Truth and Method, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald.G.Marshall, (Sheed and Ward, London, 1975), p.61.

[40] Dilthey, Willhelm. Introduction to the Human Sciences: An Attempt to Lay a Foundation for the Study of Society and History, p.173.

[41] For an account of Heidegger and Benjamin's hostility to the concept of Erlebnis, see Martin Jay's book Songs of Experience where there is an excellent account of the many forms that Erlebnis took in different philosophical traditions at the beginning of the twentieth century. Heidegger tended towards the use of the term "lebenserfahrung", when he wanted to write of the concept of lived experience, primarily due to his desire to differentiate himself from the tradition of Lebensphilosophie, pp.349-350.

[42] ME, pp.135-136/p.131.

[43] ME,p.136/ p.131.

[44] Agamben, Infancy and History, p.35.

[45] Ibid, p.37.

[46] Ibid, p.37.

[47] Ibid, p.221.

[48] Benjamin, Walter."The Storyteller", p.84.

[49] Benjamin, Walter. Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism, translated by Harry Zohn, (New Left Books, London, 1969), p.117.

[50] Agamben, Giorgio. Infancy and History, p.13.

[51] McCole, John. Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition, (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, London, 1993), p.1.

[52] Benjamin Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction, in Illuminations, pp.211-245.

[53] MM, p.44/40.

[54] For Adorno's analysis of the concept of "Free Time", see his essay of that title, "Freizeit", in Gesammelte Schriften, 10.2, Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft, II, (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1996), pp. 645-655. Adorno, T W., Critical Models - interventions and catchwords, translated and with a preface by Henry.W. Pickford, (Columbia University Press, New York, Chichester, West Sussex, 1998), pp.167-177.

[55] Adorno, T.W. "Über Tradition", in Gesammelte Schriften, 10.1, p.320. "On Tradition", Telos,no.94, Winter, 1992-1993, p.82.

[56] Agamben, Giorgio. The Idea of Prose, translated by Michael Sullivan and Sam Whitsett, (SUNY, New York, 1995).

[57] This is a formulation given to Agamben's project in a book by Thomas Carl Wall, entitled Radical Passivity: Levinas, Blanchot and Agamben, (SUNY, New York, 1999), p.155.

[58] Jay, Martin. "is Experience Still in Crisis ?", p.145.

Chapter Six: Negative Dialectic as Self-Reflection.

[1] Simon Jarvis has highlighted the relation to these different, but related senses of speculation in his account of Adorno's speculative thought, in "What is Speculative Thinking?", Revue Internationale de Philosophie, no.1, Janvier,2004, pp.69-85.

[2] ND, pp.227-228/228.

[3] Hegel's account *in nuce* of the dialectic of self-consciousness as experience (Erfahrung) is contained in Phenomenology of Spirit , pp.46-57.

[4] O'Connor, Brian. "The Concept of Mediation in Hegel and Adorno", Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain, 1999, 39/40, pp.84-96.

[5] Hegel, G.W.F. Phenomenology of Spirit, p.52.

[6] Ibid, p.55.

[7] Ibid, p.105.

[8] PMP, p.154/104.

[9] PMP, p.154/104.

[10] PMP, p.205/138.

[11] O'Connor, Brian "The Concept of Mediation in Hegel and Adorno", pp.91-96. In his book, Adorno's Negative Dialectic. Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality, (MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 2004), O'Connor gives a more sympathetic construction of Adorno's project, but he doesn't alter the arguments made in this paper.

[12] Ibid, p.91.

[13] SO, p.747/250.

[14] SO, p.747/250.

[15] O'Connor, "The Concept of Mediation", p.93.

[16] SO,p.747/250.

[17] SO, p.748/251.

[18] ND, p.166/163.

[19] SO, p.743/247.

[20] DSH, p.261/13.

[21] DSH, p.255/6.

[22] DSH, p.267/20.

[23] ND, p.178/pp.177-178.

[24] Marx, Karl. The German Ideology, edited and introduced by C.J. Arthur, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1977).

[25] See Jarvis, Simon. "Adorno, Marx and Materialism", in Huhn, Tom (ed.). The Cambridge Companion to Adorno, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2004), pp.79-101.

[26] For a characterisation of Adorno's philosophy as a hermeneutic see Rosen, Michael. Hegel's Dialectic and Its Criticism, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, London, New York, 1982). Whereas I would agree with Rosen's characterisation of Adorno's project as a hermeneutics in this sense of the uncovering of the immanent social relations of capitalism embedded in objects, a hermeneutics that is tied to decoding the meaning of subject-object relations in terms of the processes of social production embedded within them, I think it is harder to see Adorno's project as a hermeneutics, or at least a coherent hermeneutics, when tied to the speculative experience of a relation to nature that is not one of labour. It is harder for Adorno to attribute or decode meaning in this relation.

[27] BW, p.379/291.

[28] BW, p.366/282.

[29] In this context, Adorno refers to his Wagner study, which has not yet solved this issue, see BW, p.368/283.

[30] Agamben, Giorgio. "The Prince and the Frog", in Infancy and History, p.120.

[31] Ibid, p.117.

[32] ND, p.311/317.

[33] Werner Hamacher does make this point about dialectics and Adorno in his book, Pleroma – Reading in Hegel, translated by Nicholas Walker and Simon Jarvis (Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1998), p.258.

[34] MBP, p.201/129.

[35] DSH,p.364/133.

[36] MM, p.100/84.

[37] BW, p.380/292.

[38] Benjamin, Walter. "Surrealism. The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia", in One-Way Street and Other Writings, translated by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter. (Verso, London, New York, 1997),pp.225-239. Adorno, T W. "Rückblickend auf den Surrealismus", in, GS,11 Noten Zur Literatur, pp.101-106, translated as "Looking Back on Surrealism", in Notes to Literature, Volume One, pp.86-89.

[39] Benjamin, Walter. "Surrealism", p.227.

[40] Ibid, p.227.

[41] Ibid, p.227.

[42] NL, p.104/89.

[43] NL, p.104/89.

[44] BW, pp.141-142/107.

[45] BW, p.157/119.

[46] The phrase "experience without a subject" is used by Martin Jay to cover a number of philosophers' analyses of experience in the 20th century, including Adorno and Benjamin, see Martin Jay, Songs of Experience,pp.312-409.

[47] Benjamin, Walter. "Convolute N", in The Arcades Project, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, 1999), p.462.

[48] see Caygill, Howard. The Colour of Experience, (Routledge, London and New York, 1998), p.83. Caygill discusses the concept of image as intimately related to a concept of colour, in that the image is to be construed like painting as a "medium of marks from out of which emerge images which cannot be traced back to the relationship of line and surface", and links this to the construction of the speculative experience of the dialectical image. This argument then inflects the idea of reading as a reading of a text, and gives a different means of understanding the configuration of truth.

[49] Osborne, Peter. "Small-scale Victories, Large-scale Defeats. Walter Benjamin's Politics of Time", in Walter Benjamin's Philosophy. Destruction and Experience, edited by Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne. (Routledge, London and New York, 1994),p.88,(author's italics).

[50] Agamben, "The Prince and the Frog", in Infancy and History, p.120.

[51] Agamben, "The Prince and the Frog",p.121.

[52] See Osborne, Peter "Small-scale Victories, Large-scale defeats", where this point is made in defence of Benjamin's dialectics in opposition to Adorno's invocation of Hegelian mediation, p.88.

[53] MBP,p.222/142.

[54] Osborne, Peter. Philosophy in Cultural Theory ,(Routledge, London and New York), p.41.

[55] ND, p.205/205.

[56] DSH, p.272/26.

[57] DSH, p.272/26.

[58] ND, p.135/135.

[59] ND, p.221/221-222.

[60] ND, p.267/270.

[61] ND, p.240/241.

[62] In her article on Freud and Adorno, Yvonne Sherratt, writes of a marriage of Freud and Hegelian Marxism, but doesn't account for the history of the natural drives and instincts themselves, but rather posits a polar dialectic between historical ego and ahistorical drives, which has no mediation. See "Adorno's concept of the Self: A Marriage of Freud and Hegelian Marxism", in Revue Internationale de Philosophie, no.1, Janvier 2004, pp.101-119.

[63] ND, p.240/241.

[64] ND, p.203/203.

[65] This account is taken from Merleau-Ponty, M. The Visible and the Invisible. (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois edited by Claude Lefort, translated by Alphonso Lingis, 1968), and Merleau-Ponty, M. Nature - Course Notes from the Collège de France, compiled with notes by Dominique Séglard, translated from the French by Robert Vallier. (Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, Evanston, Illinois, 2003). Any critique of these two works of Merleau-Ponty's that I have been referring to, has to admit its own presumption, as one is an unfinished project, and the other is a lecture series constructed from provisional notes and student notes.

[66] Merleau-Ponty, M. Nature, p.223.

[67] Ibid, p.224.

[68] Ibid, p.223.

[69] See Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in Illuminations, p.216, where Benjamin gives this definition of aura, which is used by Adorno here, although Adorno will differentiate his concept of the auratic in terms of its use in aesthetics from Benjamin.

[70] MM, p.100/89.

[71] Benjamin, Walter. "Experience and Poverty", in Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927-1934, translated by Rodney Livingstone and others. Edited by Michael W.Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1999), p.732.

[72] Merleau-Ponty, M. The Visible and The Invisible,p.130.

[73] MBP, p.175/112.

[74] Jarvis, Simon. "What is Speculative Thinking ?", Revue Internationale De Philosophie, Vol.63.,Janvier 2004, no.227, p.82. Bernstein's reading of Adorno through McDowell and Brandom shares a certain affinity with this thought of a phenomenology of affect, but remains within a certain epistemological register through the use of concepts such as a material inference. Jarvis mentions Michel Henry in this context but doesn't elaborate on that in this article.

[75] Ibid, p.82.

Chapter Seven:The Possibility of Living Today.

[1] MBP,p.175/112.

[2] Menke, Christoph. "On a Way of Saying No", translated by James Gusen in Schafhausen, Nicolaus, Müller, Vanessa Joan and Hirsch, Michael, The Possibility of The Impossible, (Lukas and Sternberg, New York and Berlin, 2003), pp.61-69.

[3] MBP, p.175/112.

[4] See "An Interview with Giorgio Agamben", by Ulrich Raulff, translated by Morag Goodwin, in the German Law Journal, vol.05, no.5, pp.609-614. This interview was conducted in Rome on March 4 2004, and originally published in German by the Süddeutsche Zeitung on 6 April 2004. Agamben states that:

> "*Homo Sacer* is supposed to, as I said at the beginning, comprise four volumes in total. The last and most interesting for me will not be dedicated to an historical discussion. I would like to work on the concepts of forms-of-life and lifestyles. What I call form-of-life is a life that can never be separated from its form, a life in which it is never possible to separate something such as bare life."

[5] See Barnes, Jonathan. "Metaphysics", in The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle, edited by Jonathan Barnes, (Cambridge university Press, Cambridge, UK, Melbourne, Australia, 1995),p.94.

[6] Agamben, Giorgio. "On Potentiality", in Potentialities. Collected Essays in Philosophy, edited and translated with an introduction by Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1999), p.177.

[7] Aristotle, Metaphysics, Book IX, (Θ), 1047b, in A New Aristotle Reader, edited by J.L.Ackrill, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987, p.326).

[8] Ibid, 1049b, p.326.

[9] MBP,p.60/37.

[10] Agamben, "On Potentiality", p.179.

[11] See Hintikka, Jaako, Time and Necessity - Studies in Aristotle's Theory of Modality, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973), pp.27-34 and pp.94-99, for discussions of the relations of potentiality, contingency and possibility.

[12] Agamben, "On Potentiality", p.180.

[13] Aristotle, Metaphysics, Book IX (Θ), p.332.

[14] Agamben, "On Potentiality", p.182.

[15] The phrase "radical passivity" is taken from Thomas Carl Wall's book Radical Passivity. Levinas, Blanchot and Agamben,(SUNY, New York, 1999).

[16] Agamben, "Bartleby, or On Contingency", in Potentialities, p.255.

[17] Ibid, pp.259-262.

[18] Nancy, Jean-Luc. The Experience of Freedom, translated by Bridget McDonald with a foreword by Peter Fenves.(Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1993), p.59.

[19] Ibid, p.86.

[20] Ibid, p.87.

[21] Ibid, p.88.

[22] Agamben, Giorgio. Language and Death: The Place of Negativity, translated by Karen.E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt, (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Oxford, 1991), p.108.

[23] Ibid, p.85.

[24] Agamben, Giorgio. The Coming Community, translated by Michael Hardt. (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 2003), p.82.

[25] Negri, Antonio. "The Ripe Fruit of Redemption", translated by Arianna Bove, published in Italian on *Il Manifesto* – quotidiano comunista, 26 July 2003,http:www.ilmanifesto.it.

[26] MBP,p.117/74.

[27] ND, p.266/269.

[28] PMP, p.63/39.

[29] PMP, p.107/ 71.

[30] ND, p.293/298.

[31] ND,p.264/267.

[32] This is the problem with the philosophical position which identifies with certain non-causal developments in science as immediately furthering a project of liberation. In Hardt and Negri's book, Multitude, there is an equation of this new virtual becoming of the monstrous as an aleatory "sudden emergence of the new", with developments in scientific theory which privilege systems and organisms as diffuse, multiple, and without easy lines of causation. The identification of the virtual with scientific and productive developments is lacking any social or historical mediation, other than the invocation of power as sovereignty. Thus, there is a constant invocation of the sciences of molecular biology and neuroscience as supporting arguments of immanent multiplicity and complexity without any appreciation of both the multiplicity of different theories within such

sciences, and their role and status as sciences with a certain claim on power and knowledge. This results in an invocation of scientific models that is highly problematic. The idea that neuroscience "tells us" something about brain processes ignores the complex relation of information and theory, and the contestations of power that are at work in neuroscientific enquiry. See Hardt and Negri, Multitude. War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, (Hamish Hamilton, London, New York, 2005), p.337.

[33] ND, p.229/230.

[34] ND,p.222/222.

[35] MBP, p.191/122.

[36] DSH, pp.354-355/123.

[37] Ibid, pp.366-367/137.

[38] Adorno, T.W. Gesammelte Schriften, Volume 12, Philosophie der Neuen Musik, (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1996). Philosophy of Modern Music, translated and introduced by Anne.G.Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster, (Continuum, New York and London, 2004).

[39] DSH, p.295/53.

[40] Adorno, T W. "Über das gegenwärtige Verhältnis von Philosophie und Musik", in Gesammelte Schriften, volume 18, Musikalische Schriften, V, (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1984), pp.149-179. "On the Contemporary Relationship of Philosophy and Music" (1956), in Essays on Music, selected, with introduction, commentary, and notes by Richard Leppert, translated by Susan H.Gillespie, (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2002), pp.135-162.

[41] Benjamin, Walter. "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man",in One-Way Street, p.123.

[42] "Über das gegenwärtige Verhältnis von Philosophie und Musik",p. !54/140.

[43] Ibid, p.154/140.

[44] Ibid, p.154/140.

[45] Adorno, T W. "Musik, Sprache und ihr Verhältnis im gegenwärtigen Komponieren", in Gesammelte Schriften, volume 16, Musikalische Schriften, I - III, (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1990), pp.649-665. "Music, Language and Composition", in Essays on Music, pp.113-127.

[47] "Thesen über die Sprache des Philosophen", in GS,I, Philosophische Frühschriften, pp.366-371. (No English translation available).

[48] Agamben, Giorgio. The Idea of Prose, translated by Michael Sullivan and Sam Whitsitt, (SUNY, New York, 1995), p.37.

[49] Deleuze, Gilles. Pure Immanence - Essays on A Life, introduction by John Rajchman, translation by Anne Boyman, (Zone Books, New York, 2001).

[50] This differentiates Deleuze's text from that of Maurice Blanchot, whose semi-autobiographical account of a similar moment before death, positions this experience as a moment of transcendence which can never be captured again in life, see Blanchot, The Instant of My Death, translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2000).

[51] Deleuze, "Immanence: A Life ...", p.29. Christian Kerslake has argued that Deleuze's thinking of immanence changes throughout his philosophical work. He argues that, in later works, Deleuze's concept of immanence refers to a pre-reflexive state of consciousness prior to any form of subject or object. Both subjectivity and objectivity then become transcendent to a pre-reflexive plane of immanence, which is configured in this late essay as a "life". Kerslake argues that Deleuze's earlier ontology of difference was elaborated through a concept of absolute immanence that is not prior to a transcendent subjectivity or objectivity, but a sense of difference that is immanent to all forms of subjectivity and objectivity, and all relations between subject and object. The move to a "pre-philosophical presupposition" of absolute immanence as a "life", constructs an originary "indifference" as the basis for an ontology of difference, which did not initially rely on an originary concept of indifferentiation. Furthermore, the "pre-reflexive" nature of such an ontology leads to the ban on its realisation. The "life" of immanence is always beyond the grasp of a reflexive consciousness, and thus Deleuze's claim to institute a "realised ontology" is complicated by this late move towards a philosophy of immanence as originary indifferentiation. It is precisely this indifferentiation that Agamben stresses in his reading of Deleuze, that causes the difficulties for a concept of a life, that can never be actualised or thought as experience itself, or through the categories of subjectivity and objectivity. See Kerslake, Christian, "The Vertigo of Philosophy: Deleuze and the Problem of Immanence", Radical Philosophy, Vol.113, May/June 2002, pp.10-24.

[52] Agamben, "Absolute Immanence", p.235.

[53] Ibid, p.236.

[54] Ibid, p.237.

[55] See Ansell Pearson, Keith. Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual - Bergson and the Time of Life. (Routledge, London and New York, 2002), p.1.

[56] Ibid, p.75.

[57] Rose, Gillian,. Mourning Becomes the Law - Philosophy and Representation, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, Melbourne, Australia, 1996, p.56).

[58] See Düttmann, Alexander García. "Integral Actuality, in Agamben, Giorgio. The Idea of Prose, p.11.

[59] Schopenhauer, Arthur. The World as Will and Idea - Volume 1, translated by R.B.Haldane and J.Kemp, (London, Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co, 1907, pp.507-532).

[60] Ibid, p.521.

[61] Ibid, p.522.

[62] Schopenhauer,. The World as Will and Idea, vol.1, p.528.

[63] See Agamben, "Absolute Immanence", p.238, and Schopenhauer, World as Will and Idea, Vol.1, p.522.

Chapter Eight: Redemption and Reconciliation.

[1] Adorno's concept of redemption is usually only read through the final aphorism of Minima Moralia, as though this is, as implied by the title of the aphorism ("zum Ende"), the final word.

Agamben writes that Adorno uses this aphorism as a "seal" for Minima Moralia. If it is to be used in this way, then a sense of the irony of doing so is needed. Adorno's hostility to any systematic philosophy is most fully encapsulated in the form of this book, and its conclusive finale should surely be read with a strong sense of its ironic meaning that there is precisely no closure or final word. See MM, p.283/153, and Agamben, Giorgio, Le Temps qui reste. Un commentaire de l'Épître aux Romains, translated from the Italian by Judith Revel, (Rivages Poches, Petite Bibliothèque, Paris, 2004), p.63. Agamben's book has yet to be published in English, and any translations are my own, taken from the French edition.

[2] Agamben, Girogio, Le Temps qui Reste, pp.63-79. Taubes, Jacob, The Political Theology of Paul, translated by Dana Hollander, edited by Aleida Assmann and Jon Assmann, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2004), p.74. MM, p.283/247.

[3] Taubes, The Political Theology of Paul, p.76.

[4] Agamben, Giorgio, Le Temps qui Reste, p.68.

[5] Agamben, Giorgio, Le Temps qui Reste, p.69, my translation from the French.

[6] Ibid, p.76.

[7] Agamben, Giorgio. "The Time that is Left", in Epoché, Volume 7, Issue 1 (Fall, 2002), p.2. Agamben has written extensively on messianic time, but his understanding of the relation of time and the remnant is considered in detail here.

[8] For critiques along these lines, see Hirsch, Michael, "Utopia of Nonidentity",pp.47-61 and Norbert Bolz's comments to Michael Hirsch in a transcribed conversation, both in Schafhausen et al, (eds.), The Possibility of the Impossible. Bolz states that:

> "... it would have been really interesting if Adorno had conceived his negativism in such a way that he hadn't allowed it to end as an as-if redemption, in order to satisfy our desires for theology, but instead had said: Immanence is truly inescapable", (p.100).

[9] ND, p.18/6.

[10] Reijen, Willem Van, "Redemption and Reconciliation in Benjamin and Adorno", in Schafhausen et al, (eds.), The Possibility of the Impossible, p.77.

[11] Whorf, Benjamin, Language, Thought and Reality - Selected Writings, edited and with an introduction by John.B.Carroll, (MIT Press and John Wiley and Sons, New York, London, 1956).

[12] Ibid, p.121.

[13] MM, p.283/247.

[14] Deleuze, Gilles, "The Exhausted", in Essays Critical and Clinical, translated by David W. Smith and Michael A.Greco (Verso, London, New York, 1998), pp.152-174.

[15] Ibid, p.152.

[16] Ibid, p.163.

[17] "Versuch das Endspiel zu verstehen", in NL, p.294/270. Translated as "Trying to Understand Endgame", by Shierry Weber Nicholsen, in Tiedemann, Rolf (ed.), Can One Live After Auschwitz? *(Stanford University* Press, Stanford, California, 2003)

[18] NL, p.319/292.

[19] NL, p.319/294.

[20] ND, p.366/373.

[21] NL, pp.556-567/193-211.

[22] NL, pp.233-251/200-215.

[23] MM, p.126/112.

[24] MM, p.91/81.

[25]Adorno, T W. "Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka", in Gesammelte Schriften, 10.1, Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1996), p.255. Translated as "Notes on Kafka", translated by Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber Nicholsen, in Can One Live After Auschwitz ?, p.212.

[26] Ibid, p.258/215.

[27] Ibid, p.263/219.

[28] Ibid, p.267/222.

[29] Agamben, Giorgio, "Kommerell, or On Gesture", in Potentialities, p.84. Agamben also writes on gesture in an essay entitled "Notes on Gesture", in Infancy and History, pp.137-140.

[30] Ibid, p.84.

[31] Alexander García Düttmann has written about Adorno's thought as a gesture, in terms of its emphasis on the necessary exaggeration of all thought, a thought that always overshoots its object. See his "Thinking as Gesture: A Note on Dialectic of Enlightenment", in New German Critique, No.81, Fall 2000, pp.143-152.

[32] Adorno, T W. " Musik im Hintergrund", in Gesammelte Schriften, volume 18, p.820. "Music in the Background", in Essays on Music, p.507.

[33] Ibid, pp.821-822/508.

[34] NL,p.250/ 213.

[35] MM, p.179/157.

[36] Amèry, Jean, At the Mind's Limits - Contemplations of a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities, translated by Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1980), p.33.

[37] ND, p.24/13.

[38] Adorno, T W. "Fortschritt", in Gesammelte Schriften, Vol.10.2, Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft, II, (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1996), pp.617-638, translated as "Progress", in Can One Live after Auschwitz ?, pp. 626-627/135.

[39] Deleuze, Gilles, "Bartleby; Or, The Formula", in Essays Critical and Clinical, p.80.

[40] Adorno, T W., "Progress", p.637/144.

Conclusion.

[1] See Agamben, Giorgio. "What is a Paradigm?", lecture given at the European Graduate School, August 2002. (Available as a download from www.egs.edu, website visited 14/06/05).

[2] Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in Illuminations, p.254.

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